



하 룬 관

H A R O O N

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ROK GAME FANTASY STORY

ROK
MEDIA

EDICION

Haroon

– 하룬 –

- Volume 3 -

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[Channy_]

Chapter 1

Quest accomplished

As soon as Devron came back to the group with Haroon, Doran started preparing dinner. The party ended up eating bread and water, as they weren't in the mood for Doran's usual soup. The situation didn't allow Doran to light a fire anyway.

Devron seemed quite peaceful, despite how serious he was when he saw the Sun Guards. But Doran and Hall's faces were quite serious after seeing Devron. Haroon had no idea about what Devron chose to do. He didn't even notice the atmosphere, as he was busy enough with thinking of new skills and the class advancement.

Somewhen, he realized how the others were barely eating their bread in silence, including the Quad Wankers. They too, were nervous as they'd gone through a death-threat from one of the strongest forces in the nation. He also noticed that Devron was the only one who seemed to be peaceful.

'Did he come up with a good plan?' Haroon thought

He had no idea what Devron was thinking. And seeing the enemies down the mountain made him feel frustrated.

'How are we supposed to cross the river through that defence?' So that's how hard a D quest is, huh,' he thought.

Without knowing, he drew a deep sigh. It was quite loud and it drew everyone's attention. They turned their heads towards Haroon.

"Boss, you came up with a great idea, right? Right?"

Serinn, the troublemaker, made trouble for Haroon once again. People's gazes on Haroon got intense.

'Oh, shit!'

As he was getting all the attention from the party his face started turning red because of the pressure. To him, the others' hopeful faces seemed like they were blaming him for discouraging the party, when they were in a serious atmosphere already.

"Actually, there is one thing I could try, if I only had enough mana potions..." Said Haroon.

He didn't know what he was saying. That was what he came up with as an excuse. But a train of thoughts were established from that excuse.

"So you do have an idea?" Devron asked.

A strange expression floated up to his face. The others' faces significantly changed as well.

"Maybe, just maybe," Haroon replied.

The train passed the station named Brat. Brat has absorbed thousands of different elements over the years, so one of the kinds of its poison got to have a sleep inducing effect or something that makes humans lose consciousness for a moment.

But to use Brat's poison to break the defense, he wouldn't have sufficient mana.

When they were crossing Sharon Wetland, all he needed was mana to keep Brat summoned, as Brat used its own power to absorb poison. But in this kind of situation, he will need to use E.F.P. as well.

"Enlighten us," said Devron.

The others came closer to Haroon to hear him out.

"I have a strong sleep-inducing medicine. And I can spread this medicine using my spirit's power. But to spread it wide enough for us to get through, I will need lots of elemental force and mana. Fortunately, I have enough elemental force. If I have enough mana potions, we might earn enough time to sneakily go across the river by swimming or using some kind of raft."

Devron's eyes brightened up with quick thoughts. The plan of spreading medicine with an elemental spirit was absolutely preposterous, but it was a sound plan if it was

possible.

“Hall, take out all of your mana potions,” Devron ordered.

Hall’s face was still in doubt, but she followed his orders with haste.

“I’ve got 12 of them,” said Hall.

Her hands were full of mana potions with 7 mid-quality ones and 5 low-quality ones.

“Would this be enough?” Devron asked Haroon.

“Let me think about it...”

Haroon started calculating.

‘Looking at the enemy’s movements, it looks like we can climb down safely. If we choose the shortest route from the mountain to the riverside, how far would it be?’

It was hard for him to figure out the distance as everything seemed small, so he decided to ask Teeno.

“Teeno, How far would it be from that boulder down there to the riverside?”

It was sudden, but Teeno sensed the importance of the answer. He carefully looked down the mountain once again.

“I am not confident, but it should be around 1500 to 1600 steps.”

Haroon trusted him.

“And how about the distance between the soldiers?”

Haroon pointed at the groups of soldiers who were in patrol.

“It’s about 100 steps. Like a chess board, they are keeping the distance of 100 steps between each group.”

It seemed like Teeno had checked that already.

‘To keep Brat summoned and spread poison, I’ll probably need 30~50 mana per second. It shouldn’t be more than that as spirit-integrated throwing knives requires 50 mana per second. With my mana which is just over 400, 9 seconds is all I got.’

Then he realized that he got a class advancement just moments ago.

‘Right, why didn’t I think of that?’ He thought, opening his status window.

Name: Haroon
Race: Human
Class: Swordsman
Level: 10
Title: Mercenary guild leader(and 4 others)
Health Points: 1,310
Mana Points: 1,340
E.F.P.: 410
Strength: 49(+15) Stamina: 40
Intellect: 23 Wisdom: 42
Luck: 28 Agility: 35(+12)
Sustenance: 14 E.S.P: 10
Focus: 18 S.P.: 3
Fame: 600 Leadership: 350
Fire Resistance: +10%
Magic Resistance: +10%

He dropped his jaw without knowing. Seeing increased numbers in one’s status might be one of the happiest moments to gamers. To Haroon, it was even better as it was what he achieved through effort and pain.

One of the biggest changes after the class advancement was that his H.P. and M.P. increased more than double of their original values. Of course, 80 S.P. was spent in the process, but there were many opportunities to gain some.

‘Then I can maintain it summoned for 20 second while it’s spreading the poison, then I’ll have to unsummon it. So it depends on how wide it can spread within 20 seconds.’

There was only one way to find out. He had more than 20 mid-quality potions in his inventory as well, so it should be enough time for them. If Brat was able to spread the poison to a 50-step radius within 20 seconds, the plan would work. If not, there was no chance.

“It’s 50-50,” Haroon concluded.

To be honest, he knew he had a greater chance than 50 percent, but he made safe assumptions. Doran’s face suddenly brightened up when he heard 50 percent.

“Devron, let’s follow Haroon’s plan instead,” said Doran.

“Yes, I think we should.”

Doran gave a sigh of relief, and Devron seemed positive about Haroon’s plan. It seemed that they had thought of another plan, but following Haroon’s plan had a higher chance of success.

“Hall, hand all potions to Haroon.”

“All- All of them?”

“You heard me right.”

Hall hesitated, but Devron’s words were absolute. She couldn’t oppose Devron’s firm decision.

“Let’s get to the details of the plan. Listen carefully to what Haroon has to tell us, and do exactly what he says. So far, he has been our saving grace in various situations. But now, *he* is the one who holds all our hope.”

Everyone, including Briella, nodded with determined expressions on their faces.



The party quietly climbed down the mountain. They could see the bonfires made by soldiers, and soldiers eating their dinner around it. Seeing countless bonfires lit aligned like a chessboard in the darkness was quite a view despite the situation they were in.

“Then, I’ll begin.”

Haroon moved next to the boulder the party was hiding behind. While crouching, he moved 20 steps. He took an antidote in prior, and summoned Brat.

“You heard me, right?”

“Of course. You are desperate for my help, right?”

As Brat’s cockiness goes high up in the air, Haroon’s fist followed high up in the air. It was fortunate that they were in darkness, or else, the party would have thought that Haroon has quite a strange way to communicate with the spirits.

“Move with haste, if you know what to do.”

“Okie.”

Brat started to spread sleep-inducing particles in every direction. Counting to exactly 20, Haroon unsummoned Brat.

‘Then, let’s see.’

Haroon started walking slowly towards the river. He maintained a low-pose just in case. The party, who already took an antidote like Haroon told them in prior, followed Haroon. Haroon stopped at exactly 220 steps. He could see the soldiers sleeping soundly.

‘Oh, it can spread wider than I’ve imagined. I have enough mana potions, then.’

After taking a low-quality potion, Haroon waited until his mana fully regenerated, and summoned Brat.

“Then, Let’s move.”

“Oh, you are enjoying this. Why are you enjoying this more than me when I am doing all the work?”

It was being cocky towards its master again as it now had something to brag about. It

annoyed Haroon, but Haroon decided to deal with it as what Brat had to do was very important for the party.

The party was able to reach the riverside after Haroon had taken another antidote and 7 low-quality mana potions. All thanks to Brat's work.

"Finally, we are at the river."

Soon, the rest of the party came next to Haroon. Devron and Doran showed their thumbs up to show their appreciation.

"Our boss really is something," said Gitan

"Hoho, if not, why would I, Serinn still be in the Gusts of wind doing mere labors?"

"Shh! We are not out yet," Hall shushed on Gitan and Serinn.

The two shut their mouths, and cringed their faces. Of course, they knew it wasn't the time for chatter and laughs.

"What should we do now? There are guards at the riverside too..." said Doran, Worriedly

Devron smiled and answered.

"Haroon, Hall and I will take care of them. Just go with rest of the Gusts of Wind and Teeno, get the raft ready."

Doran nodded, and put the logs they brought down on the ground. Philip and Gitan also brought some logs, and they started building raft out of them.

Teeno, who had lots of talent and quick hands, built the raft easily with the three others' help. He connected the logs, and started attaching wooden panels using strings made out of orc tendon.

Devron moved up the river and hall moved down. They will need to take out the guards in at least two watchpoints. Haroon crept across the ground next to the riverside. There were bonfires lit with a 30 steps interval, and two guards were patrolling, crossing each other's paths occasionally.

There must be guards watching from the bridge anyways, so from now on, this was a matter of time. They needed to take out the guards, and set the raft afloat before anyone notices.

Haroon took out a throwing knife, and put it back again. He had to kill some knights before, but he didn't want to kill the soldiers, who are probably acting against them only because they were ordered to do so. Instead, he could just use Brat's sleeping poison once again. So he summoned Brat.

"Brat, same thing, one more time."

"You are being peculiarly disturbing today."

Haroon gnashed his teeth at Brat's brattish behaviour. At least it could take physical damage from him, as it was an essential spirit. But that kind of threat only worked temporarily. He thought he must find some new kind of weakness to take the lead back.

The guards who were patrolling 7 bonfires right and left of him had fallen asleep.

"Let's go," said Haroon.

With his signal, Serinn and Ritrina lifted Briella and the two kids with their arms and ran down to the river. The other four launched the makeshift raft and followed the girls.

"Who is it?!"

"Somebody's trying to cross the river!"

The fallen guards had been spotted already. The party could hear commotions rising up from places far away. Haroon could see Devron and Hall running towards the river from 100 steps away. Haroon had another task to do. As soon as he saw Doran and Teenoo boarding the kids and Briella on the raft, he summoned Brat once again.

"Extinguish the bonfire as much as you can."

"Geez."

Brat moved without even saying yes. Something was trying to burst out from the depths of his mind, but he just didn't bother to. It was not the time.

It didn't last a few seconds before he felt strong feeling of mana dropping down. His body was getting into a bad state. Haroon quickly unsummoned Brat and took an antidote and a mana potion.

"Oh gosh. I feel alive again. Damn, I could have died there."

He should have taken a mana potion after taking the guards down, and he simply forgot. So he didn't have enough mana to keep Brat summoned, and he still did, and that was why he felt like he was losing his consciousness.

When Haroon ran down the the river, he could see that a large portion of the riverside darkened. It was a short moment, but it seemed it was enough for Brat to blow 6 bonfires away. The problem was that it was too much, and a knight who was watching the river from the bridge noticed that something was off, and started ringing the bell.

"What the hell is going on?"

"Enemy Spotted!"

"Where! Report the location!"

"Guards are down!"

"Take your weapons!"

Loud noises and shouts came from every direction, but the party, including Haroon, was already in the river, making their way with the raft.

The party used a water sack made with sheep's stomach. They filled it with air and used it to help them stay afloat on the water. Haroon easily made it to the raft. Hall and Devron were already at the raft.

"HAHAHA! WE MADE IT!"

"That was great!"

"Hohoho, those guards. Choke at your ransom, you dogs!"

They didn't bother to lower their voice anymore, and burst out with laughs out of

happiness. The party were swimming by one hand, and pushed the raft with the other hand. It wasn't so hard as they had 12 sheep stomachs filled with air connected to the raft.

"We are finally arriving at Paros," said Doran, as if he was deeply moved by the situation.

"All thanks to Haroon," said Devron, showing his thumbs up.

"Hoho, You've done great, Boss!" Ritrina added.

'I guess this is it,' Haroon thought, giving a sigh of relief.

A big bolt of light burst in the sky on top of the party.

"*Light?* Who can cast light that big?" Serinn cried.

The party looked around, and they could see lots of people standing at the riverside.

"Shoot your arrows! Magicians, use any kind of magic! We can't let them cross the river no matter what happens!" Someone shouted from the bridge.

That man was wearing an armor with a giant red circle carved on his chestplate. Devron was surprised at seeing him.

"That's Count Maxron, the Chief Knight of the Sunguards!"

Whoever he is, it seems like that man is quite strong, seeing how surprised Devron is to see him. Everyone panicked, but Teenoo calmly started untangling air sacks from the raft.

"We got to move under the raft. Take one person with you."

As soon as he finished his sentence, arrows were coming from the riverside. The party had already made it halfway to the other side, but they weren't out of arrow's range yet. They were in danger once again.

Devron made his body thrust up by pushing the air sack down, and parried arrows with his sword. But he couldn't parry all of them. When Devron's body sunk again,

Philip and Haroon did the same thing. Despite how they parried some portion of the arrows to protect the party, a short cry came out of Hall's mouth.

"Dive and go under the raft!" said Devron, hugging Briella and diving into the water.

Doran took Sepher, while Teenoo took Sepia with him. But Hall, couldn't move. An arrow that penetrated her shoulder was still stuck to her body.

As the Quad Wankers already dove under the raft, they didn't know what situation Hall was in. Haroon hastily swam to Hall.

"Kugh!" Haroon cried.

With pain, he felt something shoving into his back, but there was no time for him to check whatsoever. Enduring the pain, Haroon grasped her head and dove under the water with her.

Her eyes widened out of astonishment from the situation, but she didn't resist Haroon's hand from letting her head go and holding her waist. She knew the situation as well.

The party could feel the noise and vibration made by the arrows hitting the raft. The knights and soldiers were shooting so many that the party could hear the noise continuously.

With a dim moonlight, Haroon could see Devron, Doran, and Teenoo putting the air sack to the kids' lips. He saw Hall puffing her cheeks, then found out she was going out of breath. He quickly put the air sack to her lips. Unlike how she remained aloof, she knew the situation and quickly held the air sack with her mouth.

As the party moved under the raft, they no longer had control of it. The raft flew down the river. If it continued like this, they wouldn't make it to Paros even if they survived. Everyone knew it, and they tried to move the raft as best as they could, but they couldn't as their hands were not free.

BOOM!

With a loud explosion, the raft shattered into pieces. The pieces were pushed down to the riverbed, then was shot up in the air because of the thrust, and the group were

pushed down to the bottom of the river.

A form of magic must have smited the raft. The impact spread inside the water, and the damage of it was severe. Haroon could see Serinn, Ritrina, Hall and the kids painfully distorting their bodies. It seemed that they had breathed in water in surprise.

The others were in a daze as well. In this exigency, the enemy would never miss the moment when they would soon resurface from the water. Nobody would survive from the endless arrows and magics.

Haroon bit his lips, and summoned Brat on stand-by mode.

– “You know what’s going on, right? Push us to the opposite side of river by creating a giant wave.

– “No! You would die!”

Brat screamed. He would, if it followed his orders. He could feel that his health and mana is so low. He could tell from the state of his body, even if he didn’t check the status window.

He couldn’t even drink a potion because he was still holding Hall. But if he doesn’t risk his life, nobody would survive.

– “It’s OK even if I die. Your mas has the ability to revive.”

There will be death penalties. But it couldn’t be helped. The only one who can revive among the party was Haroon. Brat needed to move quickly. Haroon could feel that he was losing breath, and was falling unconscious.

– “Alright. It would be so simple if you were escaping alone, and plus, my ability isn’t enough to create a tsunami. *Tsk, tsk*. I can’t understand why you want me to do such a crazy thing, but never forget my grace.”

Brat was acting arrogant instead of being cocky as if it understood the situation, and Haroon could let him be. Haroon pushed Hall to Devron, moved his feet as fast as he could, and pushed his head out of the water.

Like he expected, some arrows hit the arm that he lifted to cover his face. Haroon took a deep breath, and summoned Brat.

“Summon!”

With that as his last word, he lost consciousness.

“Stormic Wave!”

With Brat’s elemental magic, the flow of the river suddenly changed. Instead of streaming down, the river rose high up like a tsunami, barreling towards the riverside.

The enemies still shot arrows and attacked the wave with magic, but the fast, strong wave rapidly carried the party all the way to the bank, to the territory of Viscounty of Paros.

“What the hell just happened?”

“How did the river just...?”

The soldiers and magicians were shocked by the scene they just witnessed. They never heard of such magic, nor any natural disaster related to it.

“Fuck! Who could have known they had a magician with such ability! We lost track of another one, didn’t we?”

Maxron clenched his fist so hard that it started bleeding.

“But this is not the end, sir,” said someone standing next to Count Maxron.

Viscountess Char, the Chief Knight of the Red Moons, didn’t take her eyes off from the other side of the river, where the wave hit. A few people staggering and standing up came into her cold eyes. One of them was a teenage girl. Char’s eyes burned with anger upon seeing that girl.

“Hohoho, I never thought I would get stabbed in the back like this. Not from a royal successor with the weakest force at her back.”

“‘Stabbed in the back’? They’ve just sneaked out of the iron ring made by two

knightages and 10,000 arms, and you call this ‘stabbed in the back’? No! This is what she is capable of, Viscountess Char!”

She nodded.

“I suppose you are right, Count Maxron. There is no way that she got out of our hands with pure luck. Which means...”

A strange expression appeared on her face. Count Maxron’s eyes twitched with amusement.

“This is going to be fun. A big variable has just appeared. It is quite amazing how Sir Lenion’s prediction turned out to be right.”

“Hohoho, you are right. We’ve done our best, and she still got out. Just like Sir Lenion said, this proves that she is the dark horse.”

With a mixed feeling of frustration and excitement, they looked at the opposite side of the river.

Chapter 2

The Black Market

– “Welcome back!”

While Haroon was still confused about his current situation, Bell’s voice greeted him. Haroon had hardly opened his eyes. He wasn’t yet awake since the shock from the moment of death, and was frowning his face. Bell was looking down on him with worry.

“What a pleasant feeling,” said Haroon, sarcastically.

Bell snorted, and quietly giggled.

“Don’t laugh!”

Upon hearing that, she tried her best to erase the joyful expression from her face.

– “But I am glad to see you back.”

“Welp!”

He suddenly realized that he was no match for Bell in terms of talking. While he was playing games, Bell has been growing through the large consumption of information on internet. It has only been two months since he met her, but she had already grown up from a little girl to a teenager. He imagined that it was the property of A.I.s with egos. Although what he sees is a visual hologram of her, her appearance has changed too. She had the appearance of an adolescent girl.

‘So A.I.s can grow too? Maybe I could see her lady form one day,’ he thought.

Haroon got curious about how far she will grow, but soon got depressed again when he thought of his character’s death. He expected it from Brat’s warning, but it was still unpleasant.

– “But did you really have to kill yourself?” Bell sharply criticized.

She was asking like she was the one who got sacrificed. But Haroon just smiled back. Haroon realized that Bell would have known every moment of his gameplay. It was a mere guess, but he was still positive that Bell would have experienced the same thing that he was experiencing, indirectly through electrical signals that she receives and sends. And he supposed she'd probably be judging his actions by her ego.

“If I didn't sacrifice myself there, I wouldn't have accomplished the quest,” Haroon replied.

– “But even if you didn't, there are still numerous ways to be strong”

Which was very true. At his command, Bell could always search the entire web and tell him the most efficient way to be strong.

“But this is the way humans live their lives.”

– ““The way humans live their lives’?” Bell seemed confused.

Haroon was confident about it. Apart from the quest, the party had now become his friends that he shared tears and smiles with, so he couldn't just let them die from the enemies' arrows and magic, nor could he let them drown to death. It would be a cowardish and selfish action if he didn't save them because he was afraid of losing a portion of his stats. At least that's what he thought.

“Let's not talk about this just yet. You may be able to understand it later on, after seeing more of my decisions.”

– “Okay.”

Bell willingly nodded. It was too much for an A.I. to understand as all she had was an indirect experience, through various mediums, even if the A.I. had an ego. She knew that herself very well.

– “So did you get a class advancement?”

Haroon decided to not point out the fact that she was asking about what she already knew. She was probably acting this way because of what Haroon told her before.

“About that, yes I did. I was lucky enough to get one before I got to the city.”

– “That’s amazing! As far as the official record goes, the number of people who got their class before they got to the city are so low that you can count them on your fingers.”

That made him feel better.

“There’s nothing amazing. As I said, I was just lucky, and there is nothing special about me,” said Haroon, standing up.

Haroon went out of the capsule and took a shower, and rested for a moment.

‘I won’t be able to play the game for a day as a death penalty. What should I do now?’ He thought.

He didn’t know what to do, as he had been living his life in the world of Beyond for the last few weeks. He thought about the moment of death, and wondered if the party would have arrived at the Viscounty of Paros well, but there was no way for him to check the result, not now.

He believed in Brat’s ability, and he was positive that they would have made it, but he was still worried about it. Although they may be non-player characters, who were just a bunch of 0s and 1s well designed and programmed, the number of hours he spent with them made him feel like they were his friends now.

‘Well, I better go out and do something more productive rather than spending my time like this. Why don’t I start with meeting Jinsoo?’ he thought.

He finally got to the Viscounty of Paros, so it will take him 15 more days to go to the city that they agreed to meet. He needed to see if there was any change in plans, and he wanted to hear about general things regarding Beyond from a user.

Haroon changed his clothes. It was after that when he suddenly heard the voice of Bell from his side.

“Oppa, I’ve got something to tell you.”

“Wait, what? How did you...”

Bell was showing her appearance out of the capsule, inside his room. She appeared like a real human, unlike the hologram video that he saw in the capsule. He couldn't understand how she was able to show herself out of the capsule.

“Hoho, I've learned lots of things while you were gaming. Now I can have the appearance of a human and move like one, disconnected from the capsule. It is limited to this room, though.”

“That's possible?”

Haroon could hardly believe his own eyes. He knew that she was a great A.I., but he didn't know that she could do that much.

“I'm slowly absorbing quite a large amount of intellect that Mother Gaia planted. I didn't even get to learn 10% of it. I can only copy the outside of a human body, but at some point, I will be able to copy the inside of a human body quite accurately.

Which meant that she learned how to clone humans. He heard from the history class that the science of previous civilizations had significant achievements on cloning humans, but it wasn't something that was being researched due to limited resource at this time.

“Hmm. It is good to see you outside of the capsule anyways. Let's see!”

Haroon grabbed her hands.

‘Yeah, I can't feel warmth from her hands. She is only having the appearance of a human.’

But it was quite remarkable how an image now has physical shape. Moreover, it felt like she was really a sister of his, as now he wasn't alone in his house.

“Oh right, didn't you say you have something to tell me? What is it?”

“Well, that's.....”

Bell stole glances. If the others saw how she steals glances and hesitates, they would never think that she is not a human.

‘She is really amazing! My step-father has invented an unbelievable thing.’

“To be honest, we are running low on medical supplies. If you don’t stock up on them soon, you should expect your physical development to slow down.”

He was worried about it too. He was able to stock nutritional supplies right after he graduated the mercenary training course, but not medical supplies. He drew a deep sigh.

“Bell, how much do we need of each, and what’s the total cost?”

“Well about that..... Oppa, they are things we can’t get in normal supermarkets, so I couldn’t get the list of the costs.

“Then how do we get it?”

“From the black market.”

“Black market?”

When he was still attending school, he heard of the existence of the black market from his friends, that they can get some ‘red books’ about women. He didn’t know what that meant when he first heard it. But that was something that the boys his age were interested in.

“If you can’t get them in the black market, there is only one way to get them: going out of the barrier and looking for them by yourself,” Bell added.

“Then I should hope to get them in the Black Market.”

The outside of the Barrier is an unknown area that he had only seen in his imagination. But Bell was right, as his stepfather had gotten those from outside of the Barrier.

Though, Haroon knew just sitting in his room and acting concerned about it would not get him anywhere. Buying those medical or herbal materials couldn’t be delayed anymore, so it was better if he moved sooner rather than later.

“Alright! Let’s sell some items on the auction, and look for the black market afterwards.”

He decided not to visit Jinsoo, and went into the capsule to enter the auctioning website. He was going to sell the items that Brat didn't eat. If the user was to sell gold to Necomwall, they had to visit the bank ingame, but accessing the auction could be done even in real life.

– “The auction operated by Necomwall is the biggest one. Do you want to use that website?”

Necomwall wasn't the only dev. company that runs auctions of their in-game items. For popular games like Beyond, they had more profit from trading items than from the subscription fee. There was no way for Necomwall to not take benefit from it.

“Nope! We need cash, so redirect me to the black market site.”

This thought flashed out. Moreover, he needed cash if he was going to the outside to repay the debts of his step-father. It was easier for him to use cryptocurrency, but it was always monitored by the government, so it wasn't safe.

– “Yes, I had a feeling you'd want to. DarkJewelry and BlackonMarket are the biggest and safest.”

Haroon surfed two sites and looked for the price range. But he would never know until he tried with one of his items, as the basic questions of an auction is, 'Is it rare' and 'Is it highly demanded'.

He was more interested in the BlackonMarket site. It received higher commission fee, but it guaranteed anonymousness of the traders. Naturally, this became the place where the children of Nobles would buy their items.

Haroon selected 'trade inside Union'. The web displayed the names of 365 Unions, alphabetically. Haroon looked for the Union he lived in.

“There we are! KO-1 Union!”

The union he was living in was located where the previous civilization called Seoul, the capital of Korea. So it was named after the country.

“Ow, there's tons of users online.”

The idea of 'nation' was forgotten a long time ago, but still, KO-Unions was standing on the top of nations with the most impressive IT technology. Humans now hated relating themselves to their ancestors, but they couldn't defy what was flowing in their blood. Maybe it was quite natural that the KO-1 Union was specialized in game marketing.

There were tens of thousands of trades being made. Haroon filtered the search result by items being directly traded. There were over ten thousand.

"That's amazing!"

He couldn't hide his astonishment. He could have never imagined that games were this popular. And he was only viewing trades being made in the KO-1 Union. The global scale of it would be vast. He wondered if the governments knew about this.

Haroon re-filtered the result by 'Beyond'. Again, there were a few thousand of them. It was like proof of how popular Beyond was. He skimmed the web page to see what kind of items were being traded. Just like he thought, most of them were gears and armor that swordsmen would use. Some were magic books or skill books for magicians or priests.

From that, he knew the average level of users are quite high now.

"Alright. Let's see how much my mana stone would be worth. The one that I got from the orc."

Haroon auctioned off the manastone, and set the time limit for an hour. One of the moderators of BlackonMarket requested for a confirmation of the item, so he logged into Beyond for a moment.¹

It was his first time to trade an item for cash, so he was excited. Haroon hoped that the mana stone would be worth a lot. Of course, it was an item that all magicians sought for, so some fortune was guaranteed, but that wouldn't be enough to buy medical and herbal materials. Finally, the auction began.

Item name: Bio-mana stone(Misc)

Class: Rare

Different from regular mana stones, Bio-mana stones are mana stones that were grown inside of a creature, after it was eaten by them. Bio-mana stones look rather crude and dull as it was used by a creature for a long time, but it's mana-conductivity is the greatest of all. Rarely dropped by Boss Monsters.

Initial price: 30 Gold (\$2100 In real-life currency)

Fortunately, the exchange rate was still at \$70 per gold. When the game was first out, it was as high as \$100 per gold, but now it was decreasing. It was expected that it would stabilize at \$10~\$20 per gold, seeing the case of other VR games.

But still, the levels of users in Beyond that had crafting-classes were so low that they'd barely began making normal-class items that wouldn't be dropped from monsters, and merchant-users rarely appeared. Trading between the users were finally beginning, but they didn't have enough gold to make it active.

'That's a relief, I guess.'

Somebody called 40 gold. Normally, buyers call 1 gold higher than what was called, so this was a good start. Soon, it rose up to 80 gold, and yet, not even 5 minutes have passed.

"Shit! That's \$5600!" He shouted with joy.

Supposing that the price stops there, that was still a lot of money compared to his monthly expenses, which was just over \$400.

Haroon's heart started pumping hard with excitement. If he was able to make this kind of trade every time, maybe he wouldn't need to get an offline job. Living his life as a dark gamer would still feed him.

The problem was the supplies that he'd have to buy from the black market. If he were to spend more than his earnings, there would be no point.

Haroon checked the list of current supplies that Bell printed out.

“Wild ginseng 1 / 3 oz, Ginseng 10 / 30 pound, White tin 5/10 pound, Epimedium 2/10 oz...”

The list was endless. Like Bell said, he was absorbing tons of medical stuff. Seeing how his body developed in just a few weeks, he did need to stock them up.

“How much would these cost? Well, can I get those?” He said, sighing.

As he had never been to the black market before, he couldn’t help but to worry. With Bell’s help, he made another list of what he really needed and printed it out on the paper. After he got the print, he realized that there were more than 200 types of materials that he needed to purchase, and he hadn’t even heard of most of them, which couldn’t be bought on supermarkets.

“But Bell, do you know where the black market is?”

“Of course. There is one even in this district.”

“In this district?”

“Mhm. There are four of them, and they are all located in the closed underground passages near the edge of the barrier.”

He heard about the transportation that the previous civilization had, called subways. The underground passages she mentioned was the passage that connected subway stations. He had been to that passage once to transport corpses when he was working at the crematorium. Back then, he never even dared to look around and only walked forward, running away from the fear of Harks. So he had no idea that the black market was located near that place.

Unions now use magnetic roads to transport humans and goods, so the underground passages were closed as they weren’t used anymore.

“Really?”

“Yeah. The scale of it is so vast that even experts don’t know the exact size of it. Almost

everyone knows about that place.”

But he never heard of it, as he was living alone, unsociably.

“What do they sell?”

– “Things you can’t get in Union. Vegetables, grains, herbs, machines... everything! Products that previous civilizations used, and even women...”

“I see.”

It was quite surprising to know that kind of place exists, wherever the sellers get those items. Maybe the man who sent Bell to him used the black market too.

“It’ll be expensive, right?”

– “I am not quite sure about that. What I could find about it is that they only trade with cash.”

“Cash? Well, I can see why that is.”

Bank accounts that Unions open for individuals are under heavy surveillance, so it was natural for them to avoid trading with cryptocurrency. He would, too. There will be more problems as they were illegal, like tax and stuff.

“Alright, let’s take a look there. Could you print a map with directions?”

– “Yes, it won’t take long.”

“And see if there is anything about the price.”

– “Alright, Oppa.”

One hour just passed by, looking for information about the black market. He got the notification from the auction site, so he displayed it in front of his eyes.

Thank you for trading in BlackonMarket, Laugh.

Item Bio-mana stone's auction is now ended. Final price was called at 118 Gold. Please pay 10% commission fee in prior, and we will assist the buyer and seller to make an appointment. Please make transactions offline.

Your trade was classified as Grade-C, and the commission fee of your future trades will decrease by 1%. We hope to see you again.

"Yass!"

1 mana stone at 118 gold. Even after he pays 11 gold and 80 silver as a commission fee, that was still 106 gold and 20 silver for him. It was over \$7420 in cash. He has never made that much money by himself. He couldn't be more excited.

At that moment, a message window popped up.

[Chat request from Haeran. Accept?]

[Yes | No]

Haeran was the nickname of the buyer. He touched 'yes' on the display.

<Haeran>: Hey, I'm Haeran. Would you be able to come to the Black Market? I run a shop here.

<Laugh>: Of course. What about the time?

<Haeran>: Well, It's 5 now... And we are still busy running the shop, so could you come at 7? We'll have to use capsule cafe to trade anyways, so what do you say about meeting at my shop? There's a shop named "Smash 'Em" in blacksmith district of Black market.

<Laugh>: Sounds good. Well, see you in two hours.

<Haeran>: Great! =) Btw, I'm running the shop with my twin sister, so don't confuse me with her. I have a mole on top of the lips.

<Laugh>: Alright.

From the way Haeran talks, and the nickname, Haroon could tell the buyer was a 'she'.

'And she runs a blacksmith shop? That's impressive. Well, Let's get moving then! For today, we'll just trade the item, and see the price range of what we need,' he concluded.

Bell agreed to Haroon's decision. She couldn't check the price range online. The only way to find it out was checking them by himself. After checking the price range, He would decide if he were to make more trades, or exchange the gold he has.

'Well, it's been a long time since I went out last.'

The gift, Bell, from someone he could never have expected, allowed him to play Beyond. After that, he has only been out of the capsule a few times. Bell has provided a comfortable environment for him to play the game, and Haroon had no particular reason to come out of the capsule apart from stocking the supplies.

Even High-end hybertech capsules that have auto-nutrition supply system and software that supports users to sleep in-game, the users still had to come out to empty waste bags or if they wanted to wash their bodies. But Bell did everything for him.

Now that he mentioned it, he wondered how Bell deals with his waste, but decided not to think about it.

'Beyond was launched on my birthday, and it has been over 5 months in Beyond time, so It has almost been 2 months,' he thought.

Thinking about going out of the capsule suddenly made him feel excited. He never thought he would. He wasn't sure if it was because he was excited about going to the black market, or if it was because he was excited about seeing a new part of the world.

Haroon took a shower in the real world.³ It's been a month since he took a shower in the real world. With Bell's help, if he took showers in Beyond, it affected his real body as well, but there was still some difference. First of all, the water felt quite different. Water in Beyond had a refreshing, and dense feeling, but water in real life was not even close to that.

“My hair’s gotten quite long now.”

After taking the shower, he looked into the mirror and found himself with long hair, enough for his bangs to hide his eyes. It was a bit disturbing, but there was no need for him to get a haircut as he would be wearing a turban anyways.

He came out of the bathroom, and took out the long coat he always wore. He covered his hair with a piece of cloth, and covered his body with the coat. On the outside, like always, radioactive dust winds was looking for him. Bell followed Haroon to the porch to see him off.

He missed the world of Beyond that he just got out from.

Against the dusty wind, he walked and walked. There were a lot of people on the street as it was past quitting hour. He looked at several faces that passed by, but he didn’t recognize any of them, and it seemed like no one recognized him.

That sometimes made him feel lonely. Well, he had once given up living with the warmth of other humans, but that didn’t mean he was feeling free from it. It was the life he chose. But now he realized how pathetic that choice was.

The entrance of the closed underground passage was a bit far from where he lived. It took about 30 minutes by walking. He has never been to this destination, but he remembered that he once went past on a maglev bus, when he was still in a public job.

It was rush hour. Several layers of magnetic roads that were built high up in the sky were full of maglev buses, taxis and cars. They were in such a chaotic jam that they almost covered the entire sky. People were being poured out of the maglev bus station-buildings like ants coming out of their hive. At this hour, Union was lively, like it was a living being.

‘Of course, there will be alienated people like me, too...’

Haroon started walking faster like he was trying to forget what he just thought of. Now that he was a bit away from the bee houses, streets were empty. Generally, people didn’t like walking for a long time in dusty winds. Moreover, multiple layers of roads and numerous stations allowed them to go to their houses without being on the streets too much.

‘Wait a minute... Wouldn’t messenger walking work in the real world too?’

Bell definitely said that abilities acquired in Beyond can be cast in real life too. His well-developed body proved it. Active skills are guided by programs in game, but passive skills that he learned with his head and body could be used in real life as well. Coincidentally, he was wearing a pair of sandals. They weren’t so thick, so it was a good time for him to check if he could use the skill in real life as well.

Human in unions usually wear thick leather boots with rather high heels. But those were quite expensive, so to Haroon, those were a pie in the sky. Wearing sandals didn’t protect him from radioactive dust, but he simply couldn’t afford boots.

‘Well! Only one way to find out!’

He moved his attention to his feet entirely. He started walking by putting just the right amount of strength in his toes, the arch part of the sole and his heel. At the moment when sole meets ground, he put more strength on his sole so he got less affected by friction. At the moment when the foot leaves the ground, he put more strength on his toes to gain momentum.

It didn’t take a long time for him to gain some speed in walking. He knew how it works as he had practiced countless times in Beyond. The only thing he needed was to adjust what he learned to the real world. Haroon’s body moved faster and faster. The secret of Messenger Knights, the Messenger Walking skill was really being activated in real life.

With precise breath, Haroon felt something strange being absorbed into his feet, at the moment he stepped on the ground.

‘Is this mana? No, since I’m in real world, is this ‘Ki’?’

Ki started to accumulate below the arch of his soles, and it started to tickle. It was a sensation that he couldn’t quite describe.

Existence of ki and its idea was found in the previous civilization. It was quite similar to what they call mana in Beyond, but it wasn’t as strong as how mana was being considered to be. To the previous civilization where people were almost worshipping the science, ki was just a thing they used to boost natural healing or to discipline their minds. To Unions, it was no more than a mere story.

It didn't even take 20 minutes for him to reach the black market, which would have took about 30 minute for average people, an hour for his old self. It was mostly because his body was in better shape, but it was more so because he was able to use Messenger Walking. The entrance to the underground passage came into his eyes, but he turned back and headed back home.

'I've got some time before my appointment, so why don't I practice the skill in real life?' He thought.

When he was going back to his house and was about to head back to the black market, he felt a change, that the ki stopped accumulating but started spurting instead. When his toes kick the ground, some portion of ki spurted back and it shot him forward. As if he was running, his stride got lengthened, and he felt as if his body was lighter than before.

He did train for messenger walking in Beyond whenever he could, but he wasn't focusing as much. He had to give a portion of his attention to the others, as he was moving with the party. He had developed till he could absorb mana while not giving as much attention as before, but using mana to boost his body was what he developed in real life.

It was such an enjoyable experience to him. He was moving as fast as if he was running, but he wasn't getting tired at all. It became more refreshing to him, probably because Ki was accumulating in his body.

Maybe he could use other skills in real life too. Just maybe, he could get some help from sense sword skill. He must be able to throw knives very well too. He smiled without realizing. He was now capable of something, even if it wasn't his sword skill or throwing skill. Painful memories of the moments he had lived with the title of 'incompetent' was now in the past.

It took 2 minutes faster to get back home, and it took 3 minutes faster when he got back to the black market. Sadly, he couldn't reduce the time by any more than that. The amount of Ki he could accumulate was increasing slightly, but there seemed to be some kind of limit.

He spent an hour training his messenger walking skill, which he originally thought he'd spend going to the black market. Now he had to go down into the subway station

where his old self would have never imagined the black market would be located.

“So this is where the black market is.”

The subway station, which was the entrance to the underground passage, was shut down a long time ago, and it was dangerous for people to live nearby. That’s how it was supposed to be, but now it was crowded with people. He could see old and young faces, nobles and ordinary people. The crowd could be compared to the biggest mall in Union.

He found it pathetic how his old self never knew of such a place.

“It’s a bit early. Maybe I can kill some time just looking around.”

Haroon entered the station building that was just one step away from collapsing. Even from the entrance, he could see the shopkeepers at their stalls and touting people. What they were selling was old stuff which were hard to see in Union.

Some kind of machine where a circular disc, what they called Records, can be set on, a Clockworking doll that plays music, cooking tools that use gas, grills that use charcoal, a kind of communication device they call ‘mobile phones’...

Everything he saw was old, historical stuff that he could see in classic movies. Most of them were items that previous civilizations used. What people use nowadays and what previous civilizations used seemed to have similar functions, but they ran with different sources of power. People would probably buy this stuff to decorate their houses, or maybe just collect them.

The underground passage was long. Somehow, the lights on the ceiling that would have been more than 100 years old were still brightly illuminating the passageway

Like the merchant streets of Beyond, the passageway was divided into four different lanes, and each passage had stalls with different kinds of items. One was occupied with clothing and bag shops. Another one was occupied with food. Either way, he couldn’t get around too much as it was so crowded. But he saw that there were vegetables, fruits, fish and seafood that he had never seen nor heard the name of. That, again, made him realize that he knew too little about the world.

The other one was full of products that the Union did have, but they were being traded

for much cheaper than the original price. Those products couldn't be traded in public, which basically meant they were either stolen or embezzled. Most of them were electronics.

Haroon wondered how much game capsules would cost. A low-end capsule that usually costs \$3000 were being traded at \$1800 to \$2000.

'Maybe I should come to this lane again!'

He was pretty sure that he might find something useful in that lane. He wanted to go further in, but he was running out of time.

The last lane was where the least people visited. Stalls in that lane sold machines that weren't being used in this era. The lane was full of shelves, milling machines, generators and all kinds of things. It was full of noises from workshops that creates machines, and full of oil odor that the humans of Unions were not familiar with.

But still, it was his first time seeing clockworking machines, so he went into the lane, enduring the noises and foul odors. In the deeper part of the lane, he could see that there were various blacksmithing shops making weaponry and tools with iron.

Haroon had no idea why hand-made iron products were being sold. But they did exist, which means there were people buying this stuff. It was the world where nano-robot machines could make all kind of things, and Haroon couldn't understand why there were people who still crafted iron tools using the anvil and hammer. But he didn't dare to question them. He knew he was in the black market.

Chapter 3

A hark, and an Outer named Nain

The blacksmith's workshops named 'Smash 'em' was located at the center of the lane. Like in other workshops, he could see two blacksmiths with muscular arms consecutively hitting red-hot iron with their hammers.

But he couldn't see anyone else, so he just stood there in silence, and looked at them hitting the iron.

"Is there anything you are looking for?"

A female voice came from behind, so he turned around. There was a lady standing there, and Haroon almost gasped from looking at her.

She seemed to be the same age as him, and she had sharp-shaped eyes. She was over 2 meters tall, and her arms could be compared to his thighs. Moreover, her vast-sized breast made her body look even bigger. She was several times bigger than Haroon, a little bit smaller than a hark.

"Uh-uh well, th-that's..." Haroon stuttered.

Haroon was originally shy, so he couldn't help but to stutter from the shock of seeing her.

"Why don't you come inside? This is our workshop and we display our items inside."

Her voice was so soft, which couldn't be matched with her body. That made Haroon recover from the previous shock.

"Do you happen to be Haeran's twin sister?"

"Oh! How did you know that na- Ah, you must be playing Beyond. My sister is inside. So you must be the one that she was expecting to come. My name is Seran, by the way."

Haroon couldn't tell if that was her nickname from Beyond or from the black market. But he greeted her anyways.

"The name's Haroon."

"Nice to meet you. Come in! She's waiting."

"Thanks"

Haroon headed inside, passing the two men who didn't give attention to anything other than hitting the iron.

"Holy-."

Haroon couldn't hide his astonishment when he saw the inside. Swords, knives, spears, axes, throwing weapons... There were various types of weapons displayed on the shelves or on the walls, shining and showing off their beauty. Haroon never expected to see anything like this in the real world, and it felt like he was in Beyond. He was very glad to see this kind of scene.

"May I help you sir?"

There was a table and chairs in the middle of the room, which seemed like the table they used to make contracts. No one was sitting there. Haroon looked around and saw a giant desk at one corner, and the one who called was sitting there.

"Haeran, I presume?" Said Haroon.

She stood up and looked at Haroon. She, too, was over two meters tall like her younger sister. But unlike her sister, she had big, pure eyes, a sharp nose, small and red lips, and a slim but glamorous body. Haroon was confused to see that and tilted his head without knowing. She too, had sharp eyes but she had a soft and intelligent look overall. She was so different from her twin sister.

"And you must be 'Laugh'?"

"Yeah. You can call me Haroon, though."

"Hoho, I see you are confused from seeing me! You don't have to. Everyone who was

told that I have a twin sister makes that face when they see her and I. It is not difficult to have a preconception, you know.”

She found out why Haroon was surprised to see her with ease. Maybe she got used to it.

“Take a sit. Would you like a cup of tea?”

“Don’t mind if I do. Man, you make good weapons,” said Haroon, phatically, upon while looking at the the displayed items.

“Thanks. My brothers are considered to be good blacksmiths in this lane, if I do say so myself.”

Haroon took his eyes off from her and looked at the weapons. Haeran smiled from seeing his burning eyes looking at the weapons.

“So you must be a swordsman?”

“Yes, Well no, not really.....”

“I’m a magician. My sister’s a swordswoman.”

He supposed so. One’s appearance usually matches with their personality.

“It was great timing how you sold that mana stone. I almost mastered circle 2.”

“I see. It’s amazing how you’re mastering circle 2 already.”

He wasn’t sure if that was true or not. He was just being phatic.

“Not actually. I’m only level 33, when someone’s able to kill a boss monster that drops mana-stones... What kind of monster did you kill to get this?”

“I was just lucky. I got to kill an Orc Warrior.”

“Wow! That’s amazing! How did you get such a monster like that? Your level must be high, right?”

He realized that she thinks he is a ranker, but there was no need to fix that.

“Well, about that...”

Haroon found her suspicious. Although it seemed as if they were just chatting, he realized that she was prying him for information, and she was great at it. Haroon decided to be cautious.

“How about we trade first and talk about it after?” he changed the subject.

“Hmm, alright.”

She looked at him with ambiguous eyes for a while, seeing how he changed the subject. And nodded.

“Here. it’s \$7000. Since you are trading an such an expensive item, would you be so kind to ignore a small fraction, Mr. Haroon?”

“...”

Haroon’s face stiffened. He didn’t know how much money she had, but that fraction was a big amount to him.

“I’m sorry, but this is all I have now. Since your level is so high that you can acquire this kind of item, I didn’t think it would be much to you.”

Haroon stood up without answering.

He already paid \$826 to BlackonMarket as a commission fee, and \$462 wasn’t so much compared to the money he would receive, so he thought about it. But when she kept on haggling, he didn’t want to trade with her anymore.

“That’s unfortunate. I thought I was lucky to trade with you.....”

There was no need to look back.

She was the one who ruined the deal. He could always make another auction, and report Haeran to BlackonMarket as a delinquent dealer, which would act as a disadvantage for her on future trades. If he set the auction time for longer than an

hour, he might be able to cover the \$826 he lost.

He didn't hand over the item yet, and he didn't need to think of it as a waste of time as he had seen many new things in the black market. Moreover, he found out that he could use messenger walking in real life, so there was no reason to think that the time he spent in the black market was not worthwhile.

But it would be a waste of time if he talks with someone whom he cannot trust.

"Wait!" Haeran shouted.

He stopped. He was almost at the door.

"You have no flexibility, you know? Isn't it a gentleman's duty to at least hear about what a lady says?" she added.

Haroon snorted.

"I'm not a gentleman," he answered.

Her face was sulking from his words. She has never seen a man saying that. Not in front of her, who has a glamorous body and beauty.

"Alright. That's it. You are being so picky on a black market deal. Just know that people DO give up some portion. It's not good to be stubborn."

Haroon frowned at her words.

"Picky? Stubborn? Hey, I came here to trade, not to hear your opinion on my personality. Let's make this clear! It was you who ruined the deal."

"Hmph! It's a black market deal anyways. What a shitty guy you are."

Haeran finally revealed her true face. Her beauty was somewhat decent, and she seemed intelligent enough that she chose to be a magician. But her personality was something else. When she considered the deal to be over, her words started to get more salty.

That irritated Haroon, and almost drove him out of the room. But he decided to make

another opportunity out of the situation.

“Alright. I’ll deal with it. But you’ll have to give me some intel for that money...”

“Huhu, I like that deal. What kind of intel do you want? I’m an information dealer as well.”

Another sudden change of behaviour. It was something that all merchants have; shift in tone of voice when the trading is to their advantage. To Haroon, it came as a relief as it meant he didn’t need to deal with her emotionally. He was bad at dealing with people on an emotional level.

“I have a list of a few things I’d like to buy. I’d like to know the general price range of these items, and the price that you would be able to get.”

“No problem. There is nothing I don’t know about the Ko-1 Union black market.”

She handed him the sack of money, meaning she’ll trade. Haroon put the sack in his pocket, and handed her the piece of paper with the item transaction code written on it.

“And you’ll be giving me the password when you get your intel, right? So you do know about black-market trading,” she said.

Although she was grumbling, her face was smiling. It seemed she really needed that item. Haroon handed her the list.

“Alright, I’ll be back soon.”

Haeran charged out of the office. It seemed she’d like to finish the deal quickly, probably being eager to go back to Beyond to try out the manastone.

While waiting, Haroon took a good look at the weapons in the store.

The weapons had vortex patterns that looked like water was flowing on them, probably made by the countless impacts between it and the hammers; and they were so sharp that it felt like the blade was cutting his flesh even from a distance. He thought about purchasing one, but he knew it wouldn’t be cheap as they were all hand-made.

“Damn, I like these badasses,” he murmured.

“You have good eyes for weapons.”

It was Seran. She was entering the office.

“They are no match to their grandfather, but people say our brothers are among the best blacksmiths in the Ko-1 Union.”

“These weapons are indeed amazing. They’ve been drawing my attention from the moment I saw them, as if I met a lost family member.”

“You’ve fallen in love with them.”

“Yes. I never thought I’d see the Damascus pattern here. Honestly, I like it so much that I’d steal it if I couldn’t get it.”

By the characteristic vortex pattern, Haroon could see that these blacksmiths use the Damascus steel technique, which is famous for its hardness, its lightness and its elasticity that is good enough to cut bullets in half. Haroon tore his eyes away from the swords, and naturally moved to the throwing knives and daggers as he was most interested in them.

“15cm long, the weight is well balanced, hardness and lightness on its best point, and it is sharp enough to penetrate a harks’ leather,” said Seran, holding a knife up.

That violently shook Haroon’s mind, which was very still even when he was arguing with Haeran, and his mind was very well reflected in his eyes. Seran handed him the knife, and Haroon took it and touched it with his fingers, then he opened his mouth.

“How much is it?”

“\$300 per knife. \$2500 if you buy 10 of them. Good price, isn’t it?”

‘Fuck! Good price my ass!’

10 throwing knives were more expensive than a game capsule. Of course, by black market price. He didn’t know the price range, so he wasn’t sure if they were expensive or not, but he could trust Seran’s words. She gave off a somewhat trustworthy feeling

unlike her sister.

“Well, let me think about it.”

“Sure. Just let me tell you that we can’t make more of those. These are our grandparent’s posthumous work, and we only got a few of them left...”

The way she talked was like a talented merchant. Haroon thought that it must be something the twins both have in common; to make their customers trade in their favor. While Haroon was looking down at the knife, Haeran came back.

“Got the list. By the way, there were some items that were really hard to obtain. Some are so expensive that even the herb merchants shook their heads,” she said.

They probably would. There is even wild ginseng included in the list.

She found Haroon touching the knife as if he was touching a girl’s body; softly and warmly, and gave him a weird look.

“Well, I wrote the market price on the same list, so I guess that should be enough. Though, note that you need to give them some time to obtain wild honey and ginseng, because they have to hire herbalists. You have to pay them in prior as well.”

Haroon’s eyes brightened.

‘So these items are obtainable. I thought ‘herbalist’ is a job that only exists in games. So they do obtain these medical things in the wild. Like I thought when I first entered this place, the lives of Outers must be different from what I knew,’ he thought.

His thoughts were getting more complicated. A giant crack was forming in the frame of the world that he used to live in. The world he knew was not the whole world. The world, and the border of it that he learned from school, society, internet and NetTV was breaking down.

“The prices of herbs like wild ginseng depends on its age, and the number of customers. Ginseng with an estimation of 50-years old are around \$5000~\$7000, and 100 years old ones are 15k to 20k. Tell me if you want some, and I’ll introduce you to a herb shop and I won’t charge you for that.”

Listening to Haeran's words, Haroon had a weird experience like some kind of wall in his brain was breaking down, and the border of time and space was melting. When the common sense he knew got smashed into pieces, a bolt of lightning went through his head, and tons of electronic signals went through his nerve system. But he could still perceive everything that was happening around him.

'Is that so. So the Union has been brainwashing me this whole time. Huhuhu, that's funny.'

He got a sudden urge to laugh.

Something was exploding in the depths of his mind, but it was quite a refreshing feeling. He wanted to laugh out loud, but he couldn't open his mouth. Instead, a large smile swept across his face. It was a very charismatic smile that gave off a feeling that couldn't be described by words.

Seeing his sudden smile, the twins felt a shudder that felt like something was shining brightly in their minds. For a brief moment, they could see nothing else but his smile. Somehow, his smile gave a feeling of refreshment to others. His smile had a strong attraction, and it made other people smile too.

'I am not so sure if I can call him handsome, but his smile is.

'So he does look like a man.'

But his smile didn't last long. Instead, a strong curiosity filled his face.

"Excuse me..."

It was the voice of a girl entering the office. She was with a man. Like if he jumped straight out from the game, he was wearing armor made with chains, and was holding a sword. The girl was wearing a black leather coat and hat.

Haeran seemed glad to see her. Saeran too.

"Who is-? Oh, Nain! Welcome!" said Haeran.

"Glad you are out! I was kinda expecting you to be away playing games," said the girl who was called Nain.

She took her hat off.

'Is she sick or something?' Haroon thought.

She had pale skin, and she looked to be weak and small, but it seemed she was older than she looks, seeing how friendly the girls were.

"I logged out for a moment because there was an important trade I had to make."

"Then I came in at the right time. I came here to buy some items."

Haeran helped her sit on the chair. Haroon was driven away from the table.

"So, how about iron ores?"

"My teammates outside are trading with your brothers. Why don't you check them out?"

"2 people is enough for that. Why don't we stay here and chat. You know what? Before we chat, I'll help you out with buying the items you want, whatever those are."

"It'll be great if an intel broker like you could help me."

Haroon wanted to go back to his house as he thought it wasn't a great time for him to linger any longer, but as Haeran and Seran wasn't giving any attention to him, he couldn't help but to stay. When the girl who was called Nain finally became aware of him and was about to ask Haeran about him, a noise of something bashing iron came from outside.

"Hark! It's a hark!" Somebody shouted. "Run! RUN!"

They could hear people screaming and a giant roar. People ran out of the office, and Haroon hurriedly followed them out. He could see a hark attacking people, and it was not far from the blacksmith shop.

"Shit, it followed us. How did it manage to break the sealing of the secret passage?" said the man with a warrior outfit.

Haroon understood that these outers have a secret passage that the Union are not aware of.

Harks are a species that have mutated from humans. Growing to be over 3 meters tall and covered in smooth skin. With their muscular bodies, fingernails and toenails that are over 5 centimeters long, they can easily break any kind of cement. And their teeth are sharp enough to cut a human's body easily.

The hark grabbed a young man who seemed like the worker of a blacksmith shop, bent him in half and threw the corpse away. Harks did not kill humans primarily for food, they simply couldn't resist the urge to kill.

"They are coming this way. Haeran, go in and close the shutters!"

A man who seemed like one of Haeran's brothers shouted at the girls, and sprinted at the hark wielding a greatsword.

"That hark, it lost two toenails to us. It must have chased us by our smell!" said Nain.

She smacked her small fist and was shuddering in anger. His first impression of her was not so good, but he could hear that her voice had a strong power.

"Three! Three of our friends got killed by that hark, and two of the warriors were gravely wounded by it. We've got to kill it even if casualties are to be made. Its movement must be restricted in this narrow passage. Oseung, prepare to fight!" She added.

"Got ya! Get your weapons ready!"

The warrior who came into the office with her was named Oseung. When he shouted, four other warriors drew their weapons and joined him.

"No! We've got to hide for now! The Union barrier defense troops must have moved by now, so 5 minutes of hiding is all we need! This shutter is made with steel and it can easily endure 5 minutes!"

Haeran shouted, but Nain didn't seem like she was willing to go back to the office.

Hundreds of years old sirens rang in the passage, and shops started to close their

shutters. Seeing how fast people and shopkeepers reacted to the siren, Haroon could see that harks breaking into the black market happened quite often

“It’s too late! Your friends and your brothers are in danger! It’s better to fight.”

Like Nain said, the Hark was slowly approaching the men with weapons. It was being cautious as there were six people with swords.

“Even if you do kill it, you’ll be arrested and jailed for years for breaking into the barrier if defense troops catch you during the fight!”

“I don’t care! That hark has already eaten more than 10 of our fellow villagers. We have to hold it until the defense troop comes.”

Nain’s will was firm. Her eyes were burning with anger. But the situation was getting very dangerous, against her wish. The hark swung its arm, and two of the warriors were knocked back, and hit the wall.

“Die!”

“You bastard!”

The others dashed forward, attacking the hark that were approaching the two warriors whom were still stunned by the aftershock of hitting the wall. But it simply clawed to counterattack the attackers.

“Kugh!”

“Huh! It’s no use! Its leather is too thick!”

Two other warriors got hit by its fingernails. Haeran’s brothers were able to hit the hark, but it only made them feel miserable, and they had to back off, barely avoiding its continued attacks.

“Fools!” Haroon couldn’t help but to swear.

He found them so pathetic. How could they even think of making frontal, honest attacks against a monster like a hark? Their strength was simply no match for it. Two greatswords did hit the Hark, but all it did was to draw two lines on its skin. That

seemed to enrage the hark, as it roared once again.

“You need to join, Oppa!”

“Alright.”

At Nain’s order, a warrior who was standing next to her drew his moonglaive and attacked the hark. The hark swung both of its arms. It was so fast in proportion to how massive its body was. But the warrior didn’t face it directly. With quick feet and swift moves, he sought for an opening, and it annoyed the Hark.

Haeran’s two brothers didn’t leave the warrior to deal with the hark all alone. Whenever the warrior was in danger, they made sneak attacks from the sides and back of it. Their movements too, were swift unlike how people think of blacksmiths.

But making sneak attacks was not enough to kill it. The hark was smart and sneaky too. It approached the warriors still stunned by the shock, slowly but steadily, to force them to fight it so it could get a better chance to attack the warriors.

“I, I gotta help!” Seran shouted.

“Oh my god, no!” Haeran shouted.

Seran grabbed a greatsword displayed next to the office and joined the fight. But at this rate, the flesh of the four would be torn apart by the hark before the defense troop arrived.

“Seran! NO!”

Haeran stamped her feet repeatedly, but there was nothing she could do. At that moment, Haroon’s eyes were burning.

“This is strange. I’m not scared. Is that really the hark that’s been scaring me so far?”

He couldn’t understand why. Maybe it was because he dealt with a lot of monsters. Maybe it was because he had a good physical development. Harks were something that kept him awake all night from the fear even by imagination. Now he was facing it in real life, but he wasn’t fearful of it.

Haroon entered the office, and grabbed a steel sword and some throwing knives. But he realized attacking it with a sword wouldn't be effective in a narrow passage like this.

'It must have weak points,' he thought.

He didn't know where those points were, but he had learned some general weak points of monsters. Among those points, exposed ones were ears, mouth and eyes. He didn't have to know the specific weak points of harks.

It was when Haroon grabbed a knife in his hand. Seran who was swinging her sword at its back, kicked off the wall behind her and made a flip to land in front of the hark. By suddenly blocking the hark's vision for a brief moment, she was able to attack its thigh, but it was an opening on her as well. The hark swung its long arms. Seran tried to back off, but its fingernails were already heading toward her head.

Haeran and Nain screamed. At that moment, Haroon saw the hark opening its mouth.

Three knives cut the air.

"Wha-What?"

Unlike Haeran who shut her eyes, Nain could see knives being thrown at the hark over her head. Those knives exquisitely avoided Seran's shoulder, and got sucked into the hark's mouth. And Nain could see, vividly and in great detail as if she was looking at a painting.

The hark started to make strange moans, and staggered. It opened its mouth so wide that it covered half of its head.

"Seran! Quick! Back off!"

While Seran recovered from the shock and backed off at Nain's shout, two knives flew from Haroon's hands once again.

The knives struck the harks eyes which were exposed as it was trying to get the other knives out with its hands. Its eyes burst. It wanted to scream from the pain, but it couldn't because of three knives, so it started to move violently.

Then they could see the hark bleeding from its eyes and mouth, realizing why it acted so weirdly.

“Did you-?”

“Haroon!”

Haroon nodded and swung his arm in a full arc. He couldn't estimate how thick its skin was, so he threw the knife as hard as he could, aiming at where its heart would be located. It hit. The Hark couldn't move anymore, and collapsed on the ground, making a strange moan.

“Throwing knife, he penetrated a hark's leather with a mere throwing knife!”

Nain murmured, shocked by what she just witnessed. Haeran was stunned as well, and looked at Haroon with strange eyes without saying anything, as if she was looking at a monster. Seran and the other three approached the dead body of the hark. They repeatedly looked at the body, and then Haroon.

Another siren went off. The first one who woke up from the shock was Nain, hearing the siren. She realized it was signaling that the defense troop has arrived. She shouted to Haeran.

“We got to move people into the office!”

Haeran understood her words quite quickly.

“Oppa, Seran! Move the injured people inside, quick!”

They had still not awakened from the shock of the severe fight, but they forced their bodies to move. They were strong so it didn't take long for them to carry the people inside.

Without saying anything, Haroon went to the Hark's dead body and took out the throwing knives. Red blood spurted up like a fountain, but avoiding it was a basic skill that every mercenary learns.

It was only after the people went into the office and the shutter was closed that the defense troop arrived. They were armed with armor suits, shields and beam swords.

Over 50 soldiers were mobilized. Some of them were even armed with flamethrowers, which was known as strongest weapon against mutated species, but all they could see was the bloody site where the fight happened, a dead hark and a dead man.

People inside the Smash 'em blacksmith shop could hear what was happening outside.

“Boss, We’ve searched nearby places, but there’s no one around.”

“Hmm, who could it be? Who could have killed a hark by stabbing its heart?”

“Seeing the wound, it seems that the hark got killed after being stabbed in its weak points by weapons of dagger sorts. And the hero got away without leaving any trace.”

“Are you saying they killed a hark with a mere dagger, when its skin isn’t cut well even with beam swords? Cut the nonsense. ATTENTION! Dispose the bodies and we’ll be searching near this place again. The hark must have broke in by some kind of secret passage connected to this underground passage.”

“Yes, sir!”

They could hear the defense troop searching the place. They lingered for an hour and withdrew without finding anything at all. They knocked shutters of blacksmith shops to see if anyone was inside, but no shops opened their shutters.

Shutters were strong enough to completely cut out the outside and inside from each other. Most of them even blocked out noise from the outside. Knocking the shutters only made people inside fearful as they had no idea what was going on outside.

Fortunately, the injured warriors carried inside were only lightly wounded. It was only then that they fainted from the pain of their organs shaking from the shock of being slammed into the wall.

When the first-aid treatment was done, the people’s eyes were naturally fixed on Haroon, who was looking down at the throwing knives. The knives had been wiped clean by Haroon. Silence lingered for a while. Haeran was the first one to open her mouth.

“Haroon!”

Haroon looked up and faced her.

“Who ARE you?”

From her words, Haroon smiled back. He kind of knew what she was asking, but there was no way to answer that question as the life he lived was not special at all. He has only changed very recently.

But the others didn't know his story, so Haroon smiling back only seemed like he was showing that he would not like to answer. Nain and the warrior she called Oppa spoke up.

“I'm Nain. Thank you for helping us out. You are Haroon, right? I'll never forget your help.”

“Name's Rosu. I, too, will repay your help. I swear on the spirit of warriors.”

“My name is Haroon. I just used an opening you made, and I was just lucky that the knives hit its weak points. You don't have to repay me or anything.”

In fact, he never thought his throwing knife skill would still work in real life. Because the situation was so dangerous, he threw the knife habitually without realizing that he was in the real world. Realizing that he is able to use Messenger Walking and throwing knives in the real world was already a big reward for him.

Especially when he threw the last knife that hit the hawk's heart, he felt something being sucked out of his body as the knife left his hand. He was thinking about what that would be, so he wasn't pleasant with getting attention from the others. He wanted to be alone to think about it.

Listening to his calm voice, Nain and Rosu looked at each other and nodded. It seemed like they gave a signal to each other of some sort. Nain took her necklace off and handed it to Haroon.

“Please, take this. Think of it as us repaying your kindness,” said Nain.

“You don't need to repay anything. You already did by saying thank you.”

Haroon shook his head, but Nain didn't take it back. Haroon saw her deep, pure eyes. Seeing her eyes, Haroon realized that she has a strong will, so he took the necklace from her hand.

"We live in Yeongheung¹ village. Visit us whenever you wish if you have anything you want from the outside. That necklace is the symbol of warriors in our village, so everyone will know you are a welcomed guest if you show it to anyone of us."

"Thank you."

A star-shaped pendant formed out of 5 molar teeth was attached to it. The gilt has come off. Haroon hung the necklace on his neck as soon as he received it. He thought that would show Nain and Rosu that he really appreciates their gift.

His guess was right. Nain and Rosu's faces were brightened with smiles.

"If you got some time, please visit our village as soon as you can," she said.

Haroon found something odd about that. He couldn't find any traces from her smiling face and eyes, so he knew it was something about her voice. It sounded like their village was in need of help from the outside. Her pure eyes and weak body moved his mind.

'I was going to find the outers who helped my step-father anyways. Why wouldn't I visit them along the way?'

They wouldn't harm the one who helped them. He had planned to go out of the barrier, and he happened to be invited.

"I will. I am in need of a few things, and I have a place to visit, so I think I can make a visit in the near future. Maybe there is something I could help with."

"Whenever you come, we'll always welcome you."

Another siren went off in the underground passage. Probably a signal to the shopkeepers and customers that there's no danger anymore.

"Bros, it's over," said Haeran, opening the shutter.

Nain and Rosu helped their teammates get up, and got out of the shop with haste. They were heading towards the deeper, darker part of the passage. The secret passage must be located somewhere there.

Haroon got up as well. The trading was done, he got the intel he wanted. It was time for him to go back. It was a long, and fruitful day.

“Wait, take these with you!”

Haroon turned back and was surprised to see the throwing knives in Haeran’s hand.

“Thank you. If it weren’t for you, my brothers and even we would have died by the hark,” said Haeran.

Seran and their brothers added a few word of thank as well. They probably waited until Nain and her teammates left.

“Nah. You didn’t, so that’s it. Hope we can have a good trade next time too.”

“Huhu! Don’t worry about it. I won’t take any profit out from you. And these throwing knives are our gift.”

“Gift?”

Haeran smiled and answered.

“I think these are your weapons. They’ve tasted blood, so it’s hard to sell anyways. It’d be worthwhile if you can kill bunch of harks with these.”

Haroon didn’t hesitate to take them. He was really attracted to those knives from the moment he saw them.

“Thanks! Then, see you again.”

The black market was lively again, as if nothing really happened. Leaving four people’s gazes on his back, Haroon left the black market.

Footnotes:

¹ Yeongheung(영흥) is currently located in eastern central area of North Korea. The name basically means 'prospering' or 'flourishing'.

Chapter 4

User Jinsoo

Haroon practiced Messenger Walking on his way home home. Accumulating Ki through the sole of his foot by walking, while giving full attention to his feet he couldn't help feel more refreshed and sense of accomplishment. It was a very joyful sensation.

"I suppose I'll have to come out of the capsule and walk on the dirt sometimes."

Of course, he could train in Beyond as the atmosphere inside of the capsule is being maintained similarly to the outside. But Bell once said that his body is floating in the air, while he is playing the game. That was why he thought it would be better to train Messenger Walking in the real world.

Walking on dirt was the best way to train Messenger Walking. Although Haroon realized that the mana of Beyond and the Ki of the real world was quite similar concepts, and even though he and his character has a higher sync rate than the other users, it would be more efficient to train Messenger Walking outside unless the sync rate reaches near 100%.

Haroon came back to his house after practicing Messenger Walking for two hours.

'Hmm, It's getting late now. I wonder if Jinsoo has logged out,' he thought before entering his house.

But he hesitated to press the doorbell for a while. He thought again, then concluded It wouldn't be easy to log out so often as a mercenary guild leader, so it was better to meet Jinsoo when he's got the chance.

He pressed the doorbell. Like he thought, Jinsoo had logged out from the game and was out of his capsule.

"Oh, hey, It's you! What's up? Well, come in first," Jinsoo welcomed him.

Jinsoo's house was in a mess. The floor was covered in half-filled instant food

packages, empty glass bottles and litter. There was a strange odor filling his room too, but it seemed like Jinsoo was not aware of the smell.

Haroon thanked Bell once again.

Haroon, too, wasn't a neat person. When he was living without Bell, his house was in a mess as well, although it wasn't as bad as Jinsoo's house. Thanks to Bell, his house was being maintained, it was neat and clean.

"Did you have dinner yet?"

"Yeah, I already ate."

He didn't. But he didn't want to. Definitely not in Jinsoo's house.

"And how about a class? Have you got one yet?"

"Well, I did, but..."

As Haroon didn't finish his sentence while darkening his face, Jinsoo realized what happened to him and snorted.

"le' me guess. You dead, right?"

"Yeah."

"Hahaha, don't worry about it. There are an unofficial statistic saying that average users die twice before they get a class. I already died thrice."

"But still, I felt really crappy when I died."

"Really? It felt like nothing to me. Maybe because I died too many times, so I got used to it."

Haroon thought that it was probably because of the sync rate. If one has a higher sync rate, they get more physical and psychological damage as well. Of course, Bell must have reduced the pain to prevent fatal damage, but it would be different from how normal users with 20~30% sync rate would feel.

Haroon changed the subject because it was uncomfortable to talk about his character's death.

"By the way, how is your revenge plan going?"

Jinsoo's face seemed quite peaceful, unlike the last time. That's why he asked about it.

"Oh, that? Well, originally, I was going to kidnap that bitch when you and my friends joined me. But you know how they made a sudden announcement about the main storyline quest, right? That's when we changed the plan."

Haroon's eyes widened when he heard about the news. Jinsoo realized Haroon had no idea about the main storyline quest, and asked.

"You didn't know?"

"Know what?"

"They made a big announcement three days ago. It's amazing how you have never heard of this. It was so viral that users flooded into Beyond's webpage and Necomwall's webpage, so much so that the site even froze for a while."

Jinsoo explained about the announcement in great details for Haroon.

The Golden Battle.

The Teronn Empire. Its territory is the only playable area in the lore of the world of Beyond. Now it has been confronted with the most chaotic political situation in history, and that storm was very imminent. The bright star of the Emperor has been burning for the last 40 years. Even the star which was being praised for the last few decades couldn't win the force of time, and was getting closer to its death.

The Empire had a tradition of not selecting the imperial successor prior to the death of the old Emperor. Instead, imperial prince and princesses needed to go under a special process to be an Emperor or Empress: the battle of imperial successors.

The Golden Battle begins with an announcement made by the senate that protects the Emperor's power, and the battle consist of three major steps.

The first step of the battle is the process of successors leaving the Metropolis city, escaping to a place where they can build up their foundation. Except for imperial guardians who gets direct orders from the Emperor, the Metropolis Defence troops, the imperial army or front-line army, everyone was allowed to hunt down the successors, as long as they were ordered to by other successors.

The second step of the battle is the war between the successors, using the physical and political power they have built up to widen their territory by subjugating others one way or another.

This is the time when many monsters are wiped out and roads are built in order to help the war. Some feudal wars take place in this time, either by feudal lords who support different successor, or by neutral feudal lords who use the golden battle as an excuse to attack another territory. During this time, common people or low-rank nobles are given the chance to get higher social status by contributing to the war for the lords they support. They couldn't get a better chance than this.

The third step is the final battle where the last four successors needs to fight on the site called 'Emperor's Ground'. Under the Senate's control, each successor is allowed to enter with a limited amount of help for this battle, the winner claiming the throne. If any of the defeated survive, they are forced to give everything they have built up to the winner, and are sent to a special place called the 'Graveyard of the Imperial Family', where they would live out the rest of their lives.

At a first glance, users did not think this tradition is morally nor ethically right since the whole continent would be covered in blood, but they soon realized there are more pros than cons.

Societies with social class systems aren't healthy for the Empire because of the greed of nobles in high ranks, those who had tasted the power of money and position. Because nobles tended to be focused on collecting money and power, the Empire's growth can easily become stagnant. But the Golden battle allowed the wind of change to blow regularly across the whole society.

Nobles knew higher ranks were guaranteed to them if the lord they support becomes the Emperor, so no nobles were satisfied with their current position. This chance was given to commoners as well.

Through this golden battle, countless noble families would rise and fall, but the

Empire could stand firmly. No matter how powerful one family was, if their lord loses the golden battle, they eventually fall. Unless they chose honor over power and became a member of the senate, no matter how well established or how much power one family held, they couldn't last for over a century.

The imperial family of Teronn Empire was blessed with numerous offspring. So the Empire was able to find the successor who would firmly and solidly rule the Empire through the Golden Battle, while taking away the positions of high-rank nobles and officers who didn't deserve to have their titles.

This was very good news to players, known to the NPCs as outlanders. Everything players could experience in Beyond was slaying monsters and collecting items. Now Beyond was offering a chance to let them build their own foundation with imperial successors to form a vast Empire. This kind of experience was something that was impossible to have in closed cities like the Unions.

They might be able to participate in war as a member of an army, or they might even get a chance to rule a small portion of land to earn some funds for the royal whom they support.

Ultimately, the fun came from playing the game with NPCs. Users were surprised from how the developers drew this out; they waited long enough for users to be familiar with playing the game with NPCs, so they could fully experience what Beyond really has to offer.

"That's simply amazing. Everything about this game is," said Haroon.

"I know, right? The scale of this game are so vast! No games can be compared to Beyond. Beyond has everything that the real world doesn't have!"

It seemed that Jinsoo was as much into Beyond as Haroon was.

"Well, then how about the revenge?"

That triggered Jinsoo's eyes, and they started burning with anger. His voice became more passionate than when he was explaining about the golden battle.

"We was still discussing 'bout the details, but this is our plan so far. Since we're gonna

take revenge anyways, I thought ruining her game character won't be enough. That's too boring, ain't it? Not just that bitch but that bitch's followers hafta be supporting a imperial successor, so we'll be eliminating that imperial successor so that bitch and her followers won't get to gain anything from the golden battle."

That sounded fun. In this way, Jinsoo will be able to take his revenge and gain a higher chance to become a noble In Beyond at some point.

"So we'll be waiting for now. When we find out who they are supporting, that'll be when we start our revenge.

"Then you'll choose the opposing side?"

"Mmhm. There gotta be one who especially hates the successor they support. There gotta be."

All these news were great information for Haroon. Of course, Bell would tell Haroon about this announcement, with more intel than Jinsoo knew, but it felt quite different to hear it from another user. It gave a different feeling, with the same information.

"So we still got some time."

"Yeah, We'll be focusing on getting skillful fonow. I am pretty sure all users are aiming for the same, since they need to be at least as strong as the knights to be free to take actions."

"As strong as the knights? So do you know how high knights levels are?"

Jinsoo gave a pathetic look at Haroon. To him, it seemed like Haroon was blind at the game because he joined late.

"Well, feudal foot-soldiers are able to fight back goblins and maybe weak orcs so they are about level 10 to 20. But foot soldiers of the Empire are about 20~30 as they can fight back most of the orcs. Squires are known to be 50~70, and they can be compared to swordsmen who can put mana in their sword. Common Knights are about 80~120. They can control the amount of mana they put in their sword to increase the hardness or sharpness of the sword. Knight bannerets are considered to be over 120, as they are capable of using aura-thread or aura blade."

He had seen aura blades before. Devron and enemy knights were using those during the quest.

“Then what’s the average level of the users?”

“Well, they say not enough data is collected to calculate the average level. Though, the official top player am a level 65 swordsman named Bloodcape.”

He could see what kind of player he or she was just by hearing the name. That player must be battling monsters like crazy. His level proves it.

“Of course, not every player wishes to show their stats so I am not quite sure if that player is the top player. But generally, people say users above level 45 are high-level players and they can fight Orc Warriors or Orc Commanders. 30~44 are called mid-level, and they can fight with lizardmen.”

Haroon was feeling proud, since he had a title named ‘Orc Warrior Slayer’, of course, it was what Brat’s OPness granted him, though. Without noticing the change in Haroon’s expression, Jinsoo continued explaining about the game.

“Game analysts say it’ll take about a year for high-level users to reach knight’s level. It’s mostly because it gets harder and harder to level up as their level goes up. In addition, Necomwall once said that it gets much harder when they get the second class advancement, but still, users’ development would be faster than the NPCs at that point.”

Of course, getting instant rewards from effort was where the fun of games came from. But developers had to put limits on those rewards as they had to keep the balance between NPCs and the users to keep the experience more real, which is probably why they decided to make levelling more difficult after getting the second class advancement.

“So that’s why we should be focusing on getting stronger. If we join the golden battle with low levels, NPCs will consider us as mere foot-soldiers.”

“Now we are on the same page, hmm? Moreover, the imperial successors will be holding events like material art competitions to recruit talented people, and their priority musta be users as NPCs have seen how much potential the users got. Although some rules ‘ave changed as the Golden Battle began, but users became more

passionate about levelling up. They are risking their lives to level up, so they get used to battling.”

Haroon felt something strange from his words and asked.

“Wait, did you just say rules have changed?”

“Yeah. Unlike the time when the game was first released, they increased death penalty to a 20% decrease of level and stats on every death after the class advancement.”

He could understand why death penalty was increased. NPCs have only one life unlike how player’s characters can be revived. That must be the point where the developers found the balance. When players’ character dies more than three times, maybe it was better to get a new character instead.

“What’s your level, by the way?”

“Well, I told ya I died three times. It got decreased so much, down to 34. But no worries. I found a big, vast orc tribe in the mountain near the County of Jorlen. It’s really dangerous as the orcs attack first, unlike how the other monsters get hostile after they get attacked, but guerilla tactics should work, shouldn’t they? It’ll be a jackpot if I find a dungeon doing that. I hope I do.”

The two had fun chatting for the next two hours, talking about the game. When he meet Jinsoo about a month ago, Haroon felt pity for him, seeing how he suffered from the abuse he got. But now Haroon was not worried about him anymore as Jinsoo seemed quite lively when planning his new future and his revenge.

Haroon wanted to chat with him all night long, but Jinsoo had to go back to Beyond as he had a raid appointment with his friends. Haroon promised to meet him in the County of Jorlen, and left Jinsoo’s house.

Chapter 5

Revival

On the next day, Haroon woke up early and nervously waited for his suspension to finish. Fortunately, the place where he revived was the Viscounty of Paros, near the river bank. The first thing he could see upon his revival was the yellow Sorbon river and the long, narrow wooden bridge. There were still some foot-soldiers and knights remaining.

‘They are the Silver Moon Knights. Then where am I?’

He quickly looked around and gave a sigh of relief.

‘I’m on the viscounty side. What a relief.’

He set his default revival location as the safe place near the location of death. If he revived on the opposite side of the river, it would have complicated matters.

As it had gone 3 days of in-game time already, most of the soldiers gathered around the river had retreated, but the bridge was still in a tense situation. It wasn’t as intense as before, but still, a few hundred members of each side were assembled on the opposite sides of the bridge.

Now that he learned about the Golden Battle, he could understand the situation of with Briella. The only thing he couldn’t understand was why an imperial successor that has Sun Guards and Silver Moons on his or her back would even bother to eliminate a weak force like Briella.

‘Well, I don’t know how big Briella’s force is.’

Seeing how two strong knightages won’t dare to cross the river, Viscount Paros must have sufficient forces to keep them away. And considering how Viscount Paros was supporting Briella, he thought that Briella might be a bigger force than what he’d seen so far.

‘Well, there’s only one way to find out.’

Haroon looked at the imposing castle gate. He couldn’t find any soldiers causing disorder at the gate nor at the bridge. They must be elites, not mere guards.

He had to check something before entering the gate. It was his status. He was concerned about it since he heard that the death penalty of Beyond was quite severe.

Name: Haroon
Race: Human
Class: Swordsman
Level: 10
Title: Mercenary guild leader (and 4 others)
H.P.: 1,210
M.P.: 1,240
E.F.P.: 450
Strength: 45(+15) Stamina: 36
Intellect: 20 Wisdom: 38
Luck: 25 Agility: 32(+12)
Endurance: 12 E.S.P.: 9
Focus: 16 S.P.: 3
Fame: 540 Leadership: 315
Fire Resistance: +10%
Magic Resistance: +10%

‘That ain’t so bad! I guess my penalty wasn’t so severe since my level is low.’

Haroon felt relieved by seeing the status. Fortunately, he didn’t get any penalty on his level as he died right after he got a class advancement. There were only a 10% decrement to his stats. Moreover, he gained some E.F.P as he overdid it when summoning Brat prior to his death.

But that only lasted for a moment. He was frustrated from the fact that he lost the stats that he had trained so hard to get. He was slow on levelling up and getting a class as his playthrough was abnormal compared to others. The only thing that he thought he was ahead in was his high stats, which was way over the average, but now he lost that.

He checked his skills as well, as he was worried about the level decrement on his skills.

Passive Skill

Sense Sword – Basic : Lv.1(92.00%)/Lv.10

Messenger Walking – Basic: Lv.2(0.6%)/Lv.5

Active Skill

Spirit-guided throwing knives – Basic: Lv.1(7.23%)/Lv.5

Spirit-integrated throwing knives – Advanced : Lv.1(51.02%)/Lv.5

Emergency Treatment – Basic: Lv.1(2.50%)/Lv.3

Compound cure – Basic: Lv.1(12.30%)/Lv.5

Trap placement and removal: Lv.1(3.00%)/Lv.3

Massage – Basic: Lv.1(6%)/Lv.3

There was no penalty on his skills. Haroon was relieved by that.

‘So NPCs thinks that outlanders teleport back to their world on the moment of death? Then people wouldn’t be so surprised to see me alive.’

There was no problem with passing through the gate. When they saw Haroon, the guards crossed their spears and stopped Haroon. Haroon showed them the bracelet which was the symbol of a mercenary guild leader, and they retracted their spears and moved aside, allowing him to pass.

The size of the Viscounty castle couldn’t be compared to the Baron castle. He wasn’t sure if that was just because Viscount Paros had a greater force than his title, but their residential area was big enough to easily hold hundreds of thousands of people; commercial streets were well developed, and roads were well paved.

He passed the square that every castle has, and headed to the inner castle. The guards checked his identity once again, then he could enter the area where the nobles and lord lived.

‘Devron and Doran must be related to Viscount Paros. Then I guess I should go to the viscount’s mansion.’

He was right about that. When the knight who was guarding the viscount’s mansion

confirmed his identity by his bracelet, he politely welcomed him to the mansion. The scale of it resembled a giant university campus. It was quite a distance from the gate to the building.

“Please wait here for a moment.”

So Haroon wandered in the garden for a while. It seemed the Viscount has hired an expert who maintains the garden. The flowers and trees were well trimmed and were creating a beautiful scene.

“Hahaha! Haroon, It’s good to see you back! Welcome, welcome! I thought you were dead at first, but then I was so relieved to hear from your members that you’re an outlander, as I heard that the outlanders automatically teleport to a safe area right before their death.

It was Devron. He ran out with bare feet and hugged him. He witnessed Haroon’s last moment, shot by arrows and magical bolts and sinking to the bottom of the river, and always felt very distressed to even think about what he witnessed.

Though he may be an outlander who can revive, or who was working as a mercenary, it was very touching to see a man sacrificing his life to save him and others.

“It’s great to see that you are well, Devron.”

“Are you alright? Is all well?”

Devron held Haroon with his hands and checked here and there as if a father was checking his son who just came back from a war. Haroon was moved by Devron’s kindness with all his heart. Although he may be an NPC, his sincere care for Haroon came to him like a reward for his death.

“Yes, all is well.”

“Haha! Let’s get in then. What great timing, I came to the main building to discuss with Viscount Paros. Our party has been staying in that building. That’s the guest house.”

Devron was pointing at an antique three-story building.

“Viscount Paros would surely like to meet you, if he finds out that you are here, but go

to your members and tell them that you are back. I think that's the correct order."

"Absolutely."

He really wanted to meet the Quad Wankers. He found it odd as he once hated them with his heart. He thought he must have gotten friendly with them as they went through various trials together.

They went through the beautiful garden of daliah and entered the guesthouse. The first thing that welcomed Haroon was Gitan's loud voice.

"Boss! Boss is alive! And he's back!"

Gitan was sitting in the living room and was eating something piled up on the dish. He was the first one who saw Haroon.

"Have you been well?" Said Haroon.

"Ye-yes. Yo-you came so late, and I-I thought you were d-dead."

Gitan said between his tears, and that voice made Haroon all choked up. Emotions are quite strange things, and it can make people act differently from how they think, and over time, changes how they think. Haroon only thought of using the Quad Wankers, but they were showing affection towards hi-

"How are we supposed to live on if you die before you cure us. I don't want to die from getting my buttcrack burst!" Gitan added, cutting Haroon's stream of thoughts.

"Ha, I should have guessed."

"Ugh!"

All emotions built up by Haroon during this reunion got demolished by Gitan. It was just all Haroon's misunderstanding. Haroon got very embarrassed and irritated, so he punched Gitan's head as hard as he could. Screw fellowship, he thought. In the Quad Wanker's perspective, they were just being squeezed out under the threat of sickness. That wasn't some kind of relationship that would build a strong fellowship.

"I'm glad you are alive."

It was Briella.

She seemed really glad to see Haroon return. He wasn't sure why she would be in the guest house, but she had changed.

She was wearing a dress, not a common cloth. She had some makeup on too. She was no longer a sick girl, but a beautiful and elegant lady.

"It was all thanks to your concern."

He now knew her real identity, so he couldn't treat her like a little girl. From Haroon's polite reply, Briella realized how she carelessly acted and blushed. She smiled back and hid behind Hall. Hall was looking at Haroon, but she wasn't as cold as before. At least Haroon could see some thankfulness shining from her eyes. She had some bandage wrapped around her shoulder. Haroon was worried about her as she bled so much, but now it was a relief that she looked fine.

"I was relieved when your members told me that you are an outlander, but it is great to see you with my own eyes!"

Doran came with his kids and held Haroon's hands.

"I am just glad to see that your kids are safe."

"It's all thanks to you, Haroon! If it wasn't you and your spirits, we wouldn't have made it here."

Without a reply, Haroon smiled and stroke the two kids' heads.

"I thought you were dead!"

"I cried a lot because I was so sad!"

Haroon hugged them.

"Thanks. I didn't want to see you shedding tears for me, so that's why I forced my body back to life."

“Really?”

“Mmhm.”

Then Haroon could see Philip, Serinn, and Ritrina coming towards him.

“Boss!” said Philip, brightly smiling

“Hohoho, see what I mean? See what I mean by our boss is not the kind of person who would die that easily?”

It was Serinn. Her face was bright too, probably because she hasn’t been doing any work for last 3 days of his absence. That face resembled those of nobles’, so Haroon got annoyed a little bit.

“I’m so relieved. I was not willing to live anymore if you were dead, Boss. In fact, I thought of killing myself after you,” said Ritrina.

Again, Haroon was so moved by people caring, and Ritrina’s loya-

“I don’t want to die with such a disgusting look. I’d better die after you.”

‘Screw loyalty.’

Those words from the Quad Wankers were not for him. It was for the weird sickness they believed that they’ve got...

Devron came back from the main building. He brought the party to the big meeting room. NPCs were simply happy to see their savior. They took some time for Haroon to catch up. After a while, Devron changed the subject.

“The request we made to the Gusts of Wind was successfully accomplished.”

It was at that moment a window popped up in front of Haroon’s eyes.

[Quest Accomplished!]

It was the quest of Escorting Briella. Soon, he could hear a joyful message.

[The leader's level is increased by 3]
[The member's level is increased by 2]
[You have gained 200 fame.]

Considering how low Haroon's level was, the quest was almost impossible for him to accomplish. In fact, it seemed 3 level up wasn't much considering the difficulty. Haroon checked the Quad Wankers' faces. Seeing how they were not showing any expression, he could see that NPCs are not aware of their level.

"And this is the 100 gold we promised you as a reward," said Devron. "It is not much considering how well you've done, but her highness once mentioned rewarding you something by herself," he added, whispering only to Haroon.

It seems like the Quad Wankers are not aware of Briella's identity.

"You've done a lot for us. Especially if it wasn't for Haroon, we would have died by the enemies' arrows and magical attacks. I really appreciate your help," said Briella.

Haroon knew it was his time to say something, but he couldn't think of one, and missed the chance.

"This is one of the few things my father left for me. I was once warned that this should not leave the imperial family's hands, but I'd like to repay you for saving my life, and it is my belief that this would be worthwhile in your hands. So please, make good use of this."

What she handed him was a small marble. It was well-polished, but it wasn't any kind of jewelry. Haroon was disappointed by its looks, but never hinted it to her.

"Thank you. I'll make sure to make good use of it."

He checked the item info right in front of the NPCs. He couldn't bear not checking it out of curiosity. And now that the whole party knew that he was an outlander, he thought it wouldn't matter if he acted differently. He heard from Jinsoo that NPCs know that outlanders have a strange habit of speaking with air.

Mysterious Summoning Marble

Class : Mystery

An unidentified being is sealed inside this marble. The being may or may not be summoned by the caster.

‘Wha-what? What is this?’

Whoever made this, they named this perfectly. It reminded him of the first time meeting Brat, and it made him shudder without knowing. Of course, thanks to that, he was able to come this far, but he didn’t want another pet like Brat.

‘What’s more is that I don’t have control of the summoned being. What kind of item is this?’ he thought.

Then he could see another window that was only visible to his eyes.

[You have completed the D-class story quest!]

[Your level is increased by 4]

[Luck is increased by 5 points]

[You have gained 300 fame]

[You have gained 30 Soul Points]

That was total of 7 level-ups! Considering the bonus stats he gains by levelling up, it would probably cover some of the death penalty. He wanted to enjoy the sensation of getting multiple rewards, but he couldn’t as he had too many eyes watching him.

“Well then, take some rest. Briella and I have some affairs to discuss with Viscount Paros, so we have to go. Viscount Paros is willing to see you as well, so he’ll probably contact you tomorrow or so. Then we’ll talk about the latest when we come back,” said Devron.

“Alright.”

Devron went to the Viscount’s office with Briella and Hall.

“Boss, since we successfully completed the first request our guild ever got, why don’t

we party to celebrate it ? We've got tons for our reward, so let's get hella lotta drunken!"

"Geez, You giant bear. Is everything inside your brain about foods and drinks, you coward?"

Gitan suggested to have a party, and Ritrina rebuked him, but they were both smiling. Anyways, Haroon was glad as the quest was completed, and the Quad Wankers were welcoming his return for whatever reason. He decided not to care if that was for the fellowship that were built up so far, or just them thinking only about curing their sickness.

"I don't see why not." said Haroon.

"YES!" Philip shouted.

Philip shot his fist high up in the air. He was not saying anything to look cool, but it seemed he wanted to enjoy the partying spirit as well, celebrating the success on the first quest the guild made. Serinn was already heading to her room to change her clothes.

Haroon and the quad wankers persuaded Teeno who kept refusing to come with them, but then Teeno lead them to a tavern that is popular for mercenaries, saying that the beer they brew and yeanling steak they make is the best in the castle. It was Haroon's first time having alcoholic drinks in Beyond.

'Damn, this feels great!' He thought.

The taste of beer in Beyond was simply great. The beer in real life was no match to it. He once heard that the taste of beer comes from water. Since the water of Beyond was not polluted at all, the beer of Beyond was on another level. With the fellowship he felt from his guild members, or maybe the joy of completing the quest, he enjoyed the mood and getting drunk.

He remembered the time when he was wandering the streets after quitting school, and drinking some bottles of beer he bought from the random closest grocery stores. That cold, thick beer could never be compared to this refreshing and tasty beer. He thanked Bell to be able to fully taste the beer.

What he didn't know was that the others could taste the beer as well. But they couldn't get the proper taste, nor could they get drunk as regular capsules are not able to stimulate alcoholic sensation to the users.

The inside of the tavern was noisy, but the mercenaries didn't bother about it and kept on chatting and drinking, building up their deep relationship. They chatted about the battle, and the memories they built up.

Haroon started to get drunk as well, thanks to Bell who was able to put alcohol in the drinks he got. It was his first, and happiest moment of chatting and tilting the glasses of beer with people he likes. His voice got louder and he started to talk a lot, but nobody thought it strange. They were all like Haroon, even Teeno.

Teeno was usually quiet, and only talked when he needed to. But as soon as some glasses of beers went down his throat, he simply changed to someone else. He was no longer a person who had lived most of his life being a slave. The slave-mind that was deep-rooted in his mind was simply gone, and now he became an old mercenary, and lead the mood of the table.

Teeno started talking about the experience he had in the world. As the spice of his experience and wits were added to the table, the taste of the drink was added with flavor, and it helped the red sunset to float on people's faces.

Serinn was the first one who noticed Teeno's change, and started to flirt with Teeno with her characteristic charm and talk only to lift the spirit, and the others enjoyed the aroused mood. Serinn was the one who got the most care of Teeno, and this was the way she thanked him.

'And I thought she was useless. Welp, I never knew how the stat Coquetry worked anyways,' Haroon thought.

Haroon began to think of Serinn in a positive way. Her stat 'Coquetry' turned out to be useful in a situation like this, as she was becoming a light of the party, and was making Teeno one as well. To Teeno who was living apart from his family without even knowing if they're alive or not, Serinn came as an affectionate, nice person. Of course, considering his age or the way his life had been, it wasn't about romantic love, but like a family member he would love to spend time with.

When the night deepened and the mercenaries were leaving the tavern, Teeno was

being treated like a vice-leader of the group in a humoristic way, and Teeno himself acted like one to help the others have a great time.

They drank quite a lot of beer, but they didn't get too drunk to not be able to move. Haroon, too, wasn't so drunk. Maybe it was the good chat that woke him up, or maybe it was his improved body that forced his body to move. It was just that...

“Ey, ya think Ah’m that eze to get?!”

Whoever she was talking to, Ritrina was so drunk that Gitan had to carry her back to the guest house.



When Haroon got back to his room in the guest house, even before he got to wash his body, the butler of Viscount came to his room and secretly handed him a note that the viscount has got something to talk about, and wants to meet him as soon as possible.

‘What is it that he’s got to talk about on a late night like this?’

Whatever the affair was, it was clear that he wants to avoid the attention of others, which meant it was an important matter. For some reason, that made him feel nervous, and it sobered him up. Just in case, Haroon took a light shower and changed to clean, formal clothing, and went to meet the Viscount with the butler as guide.

Chapter 6

New Quest

Haroon was guided to the secret basement room of the viscount mansion.

“Welcome.”

It was Devron welcoming him. There was four people in the room including Devron. Haroon knew one of their faces, but it was his first time seeing the other two.

“Come in, and greet Paros.”

There was a man with noble clothing and a young knight sitting on the chair where Devron was pointing at.

‘I really wonder who this old man really is, that he can call the Viscount’s name directly. Come to think of it, he calls her majesty, Briella by her name. Is he from the imperial family as well?’

Haroon got curious about it, but there was no one who could tell him. He didn’t dare to ask.

“I’m Viscount Paros.”

Viscount Paros introduced himself, standing up from where he was sitting. Although he looked quite old because of the white hair, Haroon could see that Viscount Paros was a courageous, sharp man.

“It’s an honor to meet you, Viscount Paros. My name is Haroon, and I’m the leader of a mercenary guild named the Gusts of Wind. I’m an outlander, and I am not familiar with being polite in this world’s standard. I hope you will understand if I act impolitely sometimes.”

The Viscount smiled, satisfied by Haroon’s politeness.

“First, I must thank you for escorting her majesty and her party all the way to the Viscounty. I heard a lot about you from Devron; the ability and quick thinking you showed while crossing the river, going directly through two knightages and thousands of foot soldiers, and such a sense of responsibility for the party that you wouldn’t even hesitate to sacrifice yourself!”

Less a noble but more like a knight in the battlefield, Viscount Paros held a mere mercenary, Haroon’s hands and shook. Haroon was relieved to see Viscount Paros’ favorable response, as he heard there was some kind of weird rules of being polite among the nobles.

“It was all thanks to Devron. I just helped.”

But Viscount shook his head, and respected Haroon’s humility.

“Even if that’s true, you’ve made it this far, breaking through such an army. Oh right, this is my son, Depo. He just came back from the metropolis, graduating from the knight academy. I hope you two can become good friends.”

He greeted the young knight. He nodded at Hall who was sitting in the corner, silently.

“I wanted to meet you in person to say thank you, and that’s why I summoned you. Also, I know that you would have received a reward from her majesty already, but I had something that I wanted to give you. Depo, bring the thing that I mentioned.”

On Viscounts’ words, Depo brought a small box that was stored in a corner of the room.

“I obtained these when I was still a young knight training in the Huk’ran mountains. I heard you like to use throwing knives, so I prepared these.”

“Thank you, milord.”

If it was about throwing knives, Haroon had no intentions of refusing them.

“Hey pal, I don’t know about mercenaries, nor outlanders, but it’s good manners to check what’s inside the gift as soon as you receive it,” said Depo, lightly hitting Haroon’s shoulder

Haroon opened the box.

“What on Uni-”¹

There were three old, rusty throwing knives that could only be recognized by their shape. Haroon couldn't understand why her majesty and even the Viscount gives him such strange items.

“Hahaha! It's not what it looks like. Those knives were used by ‘the legendary throwing knife master’.”

“These were?”

Haroon was surprised by what he just heard, and picked up one of the knives without realizing it. It might have shone with sharpness, but now it had turned rusty and dull.

“Hmph, I knew it. People nowadays don't even know that name, but you do, as you use throwing knives. To be honest, I don't know if they're real or not. I found them on some ogres while looting the battlefield, and my senior knight told me they could be.”

“I see. These throwing knives mean a lot to me. I can't thank you enough.”

Haroon couldn't tear his eyes away from the rusty throwing knife he was holding. It felt like some kind of destiny was flowing out, like an energy transferring through his arm, and it made his heart pump harder.

“I once tried to learn throwing knife skills, tempted by the legend, but I gave up soon as it was quite different from being a knight. I'm glad to see you like my gift. That gift is the way I found to express a small token of my sincerity for saving her majesty,” said Paros.

Devron was smiling as well.

There was a short moment of silence. Haroon realized that the others were waiting for him, so he closed the box and put it aside. Viscount Paros continued.

“And I'll give a word to my butler later on to permit you and your members to use the blacksmith workshop of mine. I hate to disappoint you but I can't let you use it for free. Just pay for the materials.”

“I can’t thank you enough, Milord.”

“Also, I didn’t summon you just to give you this gift. I’d like to make a request to your guild.”

“I’m listening.”

Haroon wanted to make this quick and check the items. He once heard about the legendary throwing knife master back when he was in the mercenary academy. Now it felt like he found a light in the darkness to see proof of his existence.

“Do you know about the Golden Battle?”

“Yes, I have some general knowledge about it.”

“The Senate has announced the golden battle, which means his imperial majesty will pass away in two or three years. For the next two years, there will be battle of arms and wits between the royal heirs. Most noble families are already making their move.”

Viscount Paros’ eyes were burning brightly. Through his eyes, Haroon could see how serious the nobles were taking this battle. Just like he thought, the nobles were passionate about the golden battle as well.

“We who supports her majesty, Briella, have prepared a secret training camp in the deepest part of Huk’ran mountain, on the outside of County Jorlen. We call it the Huk’ran Training Camp. That camp is where the young knights can become the strongest warriors, fighting powerful monsters that cannot be compared to other territories. Our talented youths are going under heavy trainings just to prepare for the golden battle. But the camp is located in a very dangerous place, where there is heavy interference in the mana flow. That disables communication methods using mana stones, so we have to use human power in order to contact them. “

The supporters of the imperial family like Devron and Viscount Paros had been preparing for the golden battle with an elaborate long-term strategy. Of course, the other nobles must be doing the same, though it might be a different strategy. From the Viscount’s words, Haroon could read the flow of change of a vast Empire, so he sealed his lips and carefully listened to what the viscount had to say.

“Though, the last few messengers we’ve sent have gone missing. We don’t know what

exactly happened, but something unfavorable must have happened. So we'd like to make a request to your guild. Hall is her majesty's messenger as well. She'll be handling some work while she is here. That said, please escort Hall to the camp. That's what our request is."

It was at that moment when Haroon heard a UI sound alerting that he has received a quest.

[You have received a quest]

Escort Hall to the secret camp located in the middle of Huk'ran Mountain!

The supporters of the imperial princess Briella have been running a secret camp deep in the Huk'ran Mountains, which is popular for being rich with tough monsters. Hall, the henchwoman of Briella has a very important affair with the camp. Escort her safely to the secret camp.

Reward : + 100 Fame, 100 Gold, Permission to use the secret camp

Failing the quest decreases your fame by 200 and loses Briella's trust towards you.

Haroon postponed accepting the quest.

"There is a thing I cannot understand. Your mighty knights and arms would easily escort her to the secret camp, then why do you entrust such a small mercenary guild like us to do the escort?" Haroon asked the Viscount.

Haroon had no idea about where the Huk'ran Mountains were, or how far the journey would be, but he just couldn't understand the general context of the quest.

"This place is located right next to the territory with imperial directorship. This is our front line base to the Metropolis, and 'tis full of spies sent by enemies a long time ago. But they are not aware of the secret camp, and it should remain as our wild card until the time comes. Sending our knights or soldiers is not an option we can take. Nor is sending her alone to such a dangerous place."

That explained a lot to him.

"You and your members are exposed to them as well, but they will soon become

disinterested as all they know is that you are a small mercenary guild. 'Tis Devron's and my judgement that you and your members would be the most appropriate solution for us, considering the situation and your skills."

"I understand. But we already have our plans as well, so please give us some time to think about this."

Haroon had no intention to make this decision in a rush. He and his members need to level up as well.

"As you wish. I hope for a favorable decision to be made. I hate to hurry you, but please understand that we don't have much time as well. Also, my apologies on what we presumed about your guild – that your guild is new and small. Please understand that I had no idea that you have already received a request from someone else."

In fact, Haroon was considering the Gusts of Wind to be more like a group, as it was too embarrassing to be called a 'guild', but the Viscount was assessing it quite highly. Haroon had a goodwill toward the viscount, seeing that he was a folksy and sensible person who didn't treat commoners and outlanders as lesser people.

They had a friendly chat after talking about the request.



Haroon left the main building and headed towards the guest house. On the way, Haroon looked for a quiet place to stop by. He wanted to check the throwing knives he just received. He found a small forest behind the guest house, opened the box and took out a knife.

"Item info."

Knife of the legendary master

Class: ?

Being a knife of those that were used by the throwing knife master, who is only known by a few people by legend that came down from a long time ago, these can be thrown just by willpower, though it has lost its original function since it was exposed to air for

too long without being maintained. It is crafted with materials that no longer can be recognized. It still contains unique mana that the master mastered and accumulated when the master was still alive. Upon activation, it may resonate with other knives that the legendary master used if they are near, making sound and resonating with blue light.

‘That’s an amazing item! What a great luck!’ He thought.

As a weapon, it was useless now, but to Haroon who seeks for the traces of the legendary throwing knife master, it was a compass that would help him. There was nothing similar to this, if you wanted to find a legendary figure that’s only known by a few people.

‘Hmm? What is this?’

Haroon found a strange symbol carved on a grip, and tried to focus on it. What he thought of as a simple pattern was unexpectedly complicated.

[You’ve found a skill image. Learn ‘Multi shot’?]

‘Oh, so skills can be taught by image, not only by a skill book!’

That was quite unexpected, and there was no reason to refuse it. Haroon accepted the offer.

Multi shot (Active): Basic Lv.1(0%)/Lv.5

A throwing knife skill effective to face multiple enemies. Throws several knives with an equal effectiveness as throwing one.

Requirement:

Focus 10 or higher

Uses 30 S.P. to learn

Consumes 100 mana per use

‘Nice! It will be hard to use it multiple times because of mana though’

So far, he has been empowering his throwing knife skills with Brat's OPness, but he couldn't use it easily because of the poison and huge mana consumption. He wasn't sure if this was because of the luck stat which he's been investing in, or if it was a part of the quest reward, but for sure it was a joyful reward.

He couldn't learn it right away since he didn't have enough S.P. as it was right after class advancement and learning the Messenger skills. But he was confident that it wouldn't take long, seeing how easily he gained S.P. so far. After all, he was thinking of leveling up and training his and his member's skills.

Haroon carefully stacked the knives in the deepest part of the holders in his arm sleeves. He was worried that he might throw them during battle if he stacked them on his belt.

'I'm worried that the VIP we will be escorting is emotionless, cold-hearted, but if I am to find the master's trace, I need to go to Huk'ran mountains as these knives were found there.'

Haroon decided to talk about it with the Quad Wankers in a good way. Although meeting Jinsoo would be delayed once again, it was also important to find the trace of the legendary throwing knife master. After all, the Golden Battle has changed the situation and Jinsoo had wanted to prepare rather than taking action right away.

The only goal Haroon had was getting stronger, and that was what he strived for so far. Now he was setting another goal.

Chapter 7

Devron's past, and a new member joins the Gusts of Wind

After checking the information of the knives, Haroon visited Devron's room secretly.

"Haha! I knew you'd come to me. You must be wondering who I am, right?" Devron welcomed him in.

Haroon was surprised to see two cups of herbal tea, and it was still hot. Devron really was expecting his visit, although Haroon never talked him about it.

"Y-yes. I have a few other things to ask as well."

"Well, it's a lot to go through, so why don't we start with a cup of tea?"

Devron gently pushed a cup of tea to Haroon's side. They each took a sip.

"Enjoying a cup of good tea with a good person is a very luxurious thing for me. It can't go wrong."

"Is that so?"

Haroon couldn't understand. His position is high enough to call an imperial princess by her name. Just considering that, he would be able to do anything if he wanted to.

"Then, let me tell you my story first."

As if he was enjoying the warmth of cup, he gently grasped the cup with both hands and closed his eyes. His rough, solid face that represented the suffers he went through, and his deep wrinkles were shaking, which was almost unnoticeable.

"Ha, I never knew I'd get a chance to talk about my life to someone. It fills me with emotions."

His old eyes were shaking.

“I will keep it short. I am actually Briella’s uncle. My youngest sister was the current Emperor’s wife. My lineage families have produced key figures in the military authorities of the current empire. Following the tradition of my family, I was sent to a knight academy, and I became a knight bachelor of the Messenger knights when I graduated. But when the Emperor ascended the throne, a whistleblower exposed the scandal of Viscount Fukov, the formal leader of the Messenger Knights. The whistleblower claimed that the Messenger Knights were secretly helping an imperial prince, a violation of the rules of the golden battle. The Messenger Knights were a secret knightage of the Empire, and it meant we had to remain neutral in regards to the battle. Even though I had no idea about it, I was in the same boat, so I had to experience the tragic event.”

Devron’s lineage were not high ranking nobles, but they produced talented knights. Devron was born as a legitimate child, and was gifted. With his family’s systematic education and with his own passionate training, he became a member of the Messenger Knights in his early 20s; the knightage that was considered the best of the secret knightages in the Empire.

But the leader had violated the law by helping a candidate in the golden battle, and it was exposed to the Emperor. To complicate the matter, the Messenger Knights helped the greatest threat to the current Emperor. So as soon as the Emperor had ascended the throne, the Messenger knights were annihilated to its roots. Devron was able to make a dramatic escape with the help of his sister who was working as a royal court magician for the imperial palace at the time.

“The reasons why I was able to escape the imperial palace were that; I wasn’t officially registered as a member of the Messenger Knights, and I was training in a secret training hall with a few of my friends when the purge was going on, and that only the high authorities knew of my existence, who were killed in the beginning of the purge. Of course, if it wasn’t for the desperate help of Briella’s Mother, I wouldn’t have made it through the guardians of the imperial family’s iron-like defense.”

After the purge, Devron wandered around the continent with his family slave Teeno. If the imperial family found out that Devron was a member of the Messenger Knights, there was a chance that his entire family could be destroyed. The imperial family had two secret knightages which traced and destroyed the rebels, and Devron knew how

skillful and cruel they were. So he intentionally left the Empire, wandering around the meadows of the northern parts of the continent, becoming a mercenary in another Empire, anything he could do to live on.

“And as I had never heard from my family, I never knew that my sister became an empress. While I wandered around the world, my parents died and my family became a nominal family. And about two years ago, I came back to the Empire.”

Just to realize that he wasted his time wandering around the world, giving up his social identity of a knight, being afraid of the chase that was never going on.

“I wouldn’t have run off if nobody knew of my existence... Come to think of it, life is very cruel to all of us. Who knows, if I lingered in the Metropolis, the information guilds could have found me, then my family would have gotten annihilated, and my sister might not have lived the life she lived.”

It was a truly exhausting life that Devron went through. Haroon had nothing to say about it, so he kept silent.

“I have something else to ask you. I’ve already talked with Briella and Paros after you left the basement.”

At that moment, the UI sound went off, displaying a quest window. So Haroon didn’t really need to hear what Devron was saying afterwards.

[You have received a quest!]

Story Quest

Difficulty – C

Help Imperial Princess Briella to become one of the last four successors! The current force behind Briella is somewhat feeble. Help to strengthening her force, and make her one of the last four successors that will be decided by the Senate in roughly a years time. If you have a force behind you, their contribution towards the quest will be counted as well.

Reward: Award of a noble title with ownership of land. Gear set, spirit stones, cash and Soul Points. The quality of reward will vary on your contribution towards the quest.

‘Woah, that’s a tremendous quest.’

Of course, the reward would be depending on his contribution, but that wasn’t something peculiar to mention. The reason for it being vast could be considered as an evident of Briella’s force being incredibly feeble. Haroon wasn’t interested in the honor of being a noble in Beyond, but spirit stones, items and cash did interest him.

“How’s the current situation?”

It was a quite comprehensive question, but Devron’s nervous eyes relaxed a bit, as he could tell that Haroon was interested in working with him at least.

“I need to explain this first. The Emperor had *lots of interest* in women.”

Devron’s voice was full of hostility towards the Emperor, who ruined his precious sister’s life only for love that lasted for a few months.

“He married with five women, and had 10 concubines, not to mention the number of maids of honor whom he had. That’s a first in the Teronn Empires history. Thanks to that, we had 32 of his and her majesties qualified for this Golden Battle. 3 of them gave up, 6 of them were disqualified on the first stage, which was escaping the metropolis, and there is no confirmation on 8 of them, if they made it or not.”

“So at least 16, 24 at max.”

“You are right. It’s our view that at least 20 successors have made it through the first round. That’s another first in history that this imperial family has made. In history, at least half of the successors were disqualified on the first stage, which also means that this golden battle will be the most intense one we have ever had. It makes sense, because the current Emperor has been ruling for more than 30 years by now, which gave the nobles much longer than usual to prepare for the golden battle.”

‘So basically 4 out of 20? That’s 1 out of 5. I mean, yeah, the probability is quite high...’

Haroon thought for a second, and asked Devron.

“I’ve got a question, though.”

“Anything you wish.”

“Why is it I that you chose?”

“Hahaha, you really don’t know how valuable you are. Or are you hiding something?”

Devron’s words confused everyone in the room¹ and made them look at Haroon out of curiosity, waiting for his answer. But Haroon didn’t really have anything to say.

“You have shown us¹ your sword skill on Da’in Hills, control of poison in the Saron Wetland, inhuman knife-throwing skills, quick wit and strong responsibility while crossing the river. And yet, we haven’t seen your limit. Do you need any more explanation?”

Haroon bitterly shook his head.

Haroon really appreciated Devron’s compliment, but it was more of Brat’s skill rather than his own. He knew there wouldn’t be anyone who would oppose if he claims that a pet’s skill is the owner’s skill as well, but he was embarrassed anyways.

“We’d like to focus on cultivating our ability. I’m sorry, but I don’t think we can be of great help to you, after all,” said Haroon, after thinking for a long time.

That was what he concluded. He wasn’t confident enough to jump into the golden battle just yet. He thought it was better to join the Golden Battle after developing his strength.

“That’s a great choice you made. Your help will be needed when the real battle between the successors begin in about 6 months to a years time.”

“Don’t expect too much from us.”

“Don’t worry about it. Just focus on cultivating your ability. Briella and I have a few things to do anyways. We’ll head to Tebes county where the Silent Plains are located. It’s right next to Huk’ran Mountains, where you’ll be heading if you do decide to escort Hall. Count Tebes is my cousin, and the stem of our force. The Silent Plains might be bad for farming, but mining businesses are excellent there, so we’ll be building our capital from there. We won’t have enough time to suppress all 20 successors, but we

could try.”

“Since it’s something you and Doran are doing, I think everything will go well.”

“Yes, yes it will.”

Devron’s face was full of determination and belief. But Haroon could also see worry in his eyes. The other successors have Dukes and Marquees at their backs, when they had to prepare a big event with a count.

“We will cultivate our abilities and gather mercenaries together.”

Saying that, Haroon recalled the mercenaries he’d met during his graduation day.

“Please do so. The mercenaries will move when the physical battle begins anyways, but if we do recruit good mercenaries first, we do have a chance of winning.”

Devron and Doran expected Briella to have the least amount of force among the successors, so as a solution they came up with the mercenaries. Grouping the mercenaries together would theoretically make them catch up to the others in a short time.

As the outlanders started to appear in this world, mercenaries were losing their jobs. Requests like sweeping monsters were not made anymore, and now they were losing the opportunities to get VIP or merchant escorting requests as Outlanders took them first. Devron and Doran knew this very well, and were planning to hire those jobless mercenaries as a regular army.

“I’ll talk with Paros about making the secret camp available for your plan. If you do prove that you can gather good mercenaries, we’ll support you financially as long as your money usage is detailed and not too sketchy.”

“Great. I will consider it positively.”

Haroon had nothing to lose on this deal. It wasn’t like he needed to do his best helping Briella, but just travelling around and recruiting skillful mercenaries.

Financial support was a good deal, but he wanted to refuse that. If he did get financial support from them, the Gusts of Wind would lose its free will. He did want to

participate in the Golden Battle, but he had no intention to go all-in with the Story Quest.

“By the way, What kind of person is Teeno?”

“Teeno?”

Some kind of emotion went through Devron’s eyes when he heard Haroon’s question.

It was a totally different subject, but Devron closed his eyes to gather words to answer the question. Soon, he opened his eyes and smiled warmly.

“Teeno is like my own brother. He went through all the suffering which I had to go through. When the massacre happened, he wasn’t even 10 years old. With that young age, he accompanied me starting from escaping the Metropolis. Although he was born as a slave of our family, I already spared him a long time ago and made him a free man.”

Haroon guessed so. The will of submission was always in his every action. But it was surprising to hear that Teeno was just over 40 years old. He looked way older, probably because of the rough life he had.

“He would have gotten a position in rank if he wasn’t born as a slave. Even at his young age, he showed his quick wit and brilliant intelligence. Nobody educated him but he was able to learn just by watching, or hearing someone’s action. When I wandered around the world, he helped me a lot when I got in trouble from the mistakes I made as my mind still couldn’t give up the position of nobility. Silently and firmly. Come to think of it, my life was a lot better from having him around.”

His voice was full of trust and love towards Teeno. That said, Haroon felt it was a lot more difficult to say what he wanted to say.

“To be honest, I want to recruit Teeno to our mercenary guild.”

“Teeno? Hmm, that would be fine, I guess. Teeno must be... 43 years old by now. He, too, will be an old man soon enough. He had a rough life because of me, so it must be good for him to live a new life, out of my shadow.”

Haroon could easily tell that those few words contained a lot of emotions. He couldn’t imagine how deep of a relationship they had, considering how they both didn’t get to

start a family.

“I don’t think that’s a question I can answer. Do so as long as that’s what he wants. I told you I set him free a long time ago, after all.”

“Thank you.”

“What do you mean? Everything is about his free will. Persuade him if you really want him as your member. I feel really sorry for him. I have received a lot from him, but I never gave back. I always relied on him, but he was always underappreciated. I couldn’t persuade him to live his own life, thinking of his ability as mine, the one that you saw and decided to recruit him for.”

Haroon decided not to cut his monologue. The more Devron talked, the more Haroon could learn about who Teeno was to him, and now he was getting ready to say goodbye to him.

“I don’t think he would be able to live his own life if he stays with me. It might be a little bit late, but I wish he could experience the joy of living his own life, like starting a family for instance. I hope your choice could grant my wish.”

Haroon nodded.

“To me, I mean to our guild, he really is whom we need. We’ll make sure to treat him well.

“I appreciate it. I hope it wasn’t too much to ask.”

“You are like a master to me. I might be an Outlander, but how could I forget your grace? Please don’t say that.”

“Thanks. Briella might be my niece, but it feels like you and I are closer family.”

Devron grasped Haroon’s hand with his wrinkled hands. Haroon felt the plethora of emotions that were too much to handle from that grasp. Devron’s eyes were getting wet.

‘Devron must have lived a lonely life,’ he thought.

Haroon held Devron's hand in silence, waiting for him to get settled. Haroon felt happy about Devron opening his heart up to him.



It was late at night, but Haroon decided to meet Teeno right away.

Teeno was staying in the shabbiest room of the guesthouse, usually used by servants when guests arrive. Although he was disturbed in the middle of sleeping, when he saw Haroon, he made his bed quickly and welcomed him.

"Mr. Haroon! What brings you all the way here?"

"I'm really sorry to disturb your sleep. I have an urgent matter to discuss with you, so I had to take the liberty of visiting you tonight."

"Take the liberty? By all means. I'm listening."

Teeno seemed surprised by Haroon's polite behaviour.

"On the trip with you, I got to know you well. You are erudite, wise, and talented."

"M-me? No, No. It's some tricks I learned. It's not something that deserves that kind of compliment."

It seemed he wasn't used to getting compliments, at all. Did he never get any compliments before? Seeing him all covered with confusion, Haroon felt terrible. Because of his social status, he couldn't escape living a rough life even though he was talented. Haroon felt awful seeing a man who never got to show their existence to the world.

"Well, this is official. We want you to be a member of The Gusts of Wind."

"I'm sorry?"

Teeno's eyes widened. As if it really was a totally unexpected offer, he was frowning his face in a strange way.

"We, The Gusts of Wind, might be low-ranking and small, but with someone like you,

it would be able to grow bigger and meaningfully.”

“Bu-but that’s...”

Teeno looked towards and away from Haroon’s eyes several times to see if he really meant it, and expressed mixed feelings with his eyes. He didn’t speak for a long time for some reason.

“I already talked with Devron. He told me you were already a free man, and have free will to do whatever you want, and it would be good for you to live your life.”

Teeno’s eyes widened again from his words.

“Di-did he really... Say that?”

“Yes. He said you are like his own brother, and he hopes you could live your own life, making a family, living in the world in the way a human should, experiencing the world, and asked me to make sure to give you a chance.”

Teeno couldn’t say anything. Haroon too, didn’t add any words. Teeno must be feeling the emotions that Devron had to go through. Teeno has lived a life hiding his own identity only to live for Devron, longer than the years Haroon lived, so he must be feeling something that Haroon couldn’t understand.

For a while, a silent tension filled up inside the room.

Teeno took a deep breath and duck his head. Large teardrops were falling down from his copper-colored solid face.

“Did he really say that, Mr. Haroon?”

A while after, Teeno checked it for the last time. He wasn’t even trying to hide his tears.

“Yes.”

With Haroon’s short and firm answer, Teeno closed his eyes and bit his lips to hold the tears back.

“If that’s... what he wants...”

It was a hard answer that he made, but it was against what Haroon and Devron wanted to hear.

“No, I really want to follow what you want, Teenno.”

“Tha-thats...”

Was he feeling betrayal by Devron, thinking he abandoned him, or was he moved by Devron finally setting him free?

Haroon realized it was neither. The relationship between Teenno and Devron must be way more complicated than he thought.

“The Gusts of Wind and I need you, Teenno, not Devron. My dream is not getting a position in the Empire, using the Golden Battle, like how Devron is doing, nor getting any fame out of the mercenary guild using talented people like you. Although we may be called mercenaries, I want a small but skilled mercenary guild who travels the world, seeking for new things. I want a family who could do that with me.”

Teenno’s face started to change a bit. His eyes looking in the air were getting deeper and deeper. It was changing from the slave face he used to make, to a face of an old, wise man.

“Do you really think I can do that? Me?”

For the first time from the moment they first met, Teenno looked at Haroon’s face directly. Haroon could see that a small fire of passion was lit on his face.

Haroon nodded, looking straightly at his eyes.

“Your experience and skills will come in very handy. I’ll let you be the leader if you want.”

On Haroon’s world, Teenno smiled. It was an awkward smile, but Haroon could tell that the smile was real, not the fake ones he used to make. Teenno’s eyesight was clear and sharp.

“Huh! No, not the boss. I bet that wouldn’t fit me at all.”

“I’ll make sure to treat you well. It’s something awkward to say, but I’ll look for a fiancé for you if you really want me to. Well, I’ll greet you again. I’m Haroon, the leader of The Gusts of Wind.”

“It’s Teeno. I learned little tricks, but I will try my best with them to not be someone who needs to be carried.”

After an awkward moment of facing each other, they both laughed out loud.

Chapter 8

Training

The members of the Gusts of Wind gathered around Haroon's room as soon as the sun rose, being curious of Viscount Paros' summon of him.

"First things first. Teeno has joined our guild. His experience and vast knowledge of scouting will be a great help to us."

"I'm glad if it is Teeno."

"Same."

It was surprising news to them, but no one opposed. It proved that Teeno had gained the trust of the members along the trip.

"But there is one thing I gotta tell you. Be careful when you are dealing with him. Especially you, Serinn! If you look down on him or treat him badly one way or another, I will not let it slip unnoticed."

"Hmph! At least I was excited for a second. Alright, Boss."

Serinn was going to make use of Teeno's meek, submissive mind. She got disappointed for a second, but made an obedient answer. She was going to do it anyways, and Haroon expected her to, but he thought it was better for Teeno to make his choice.

Haroon sent Philip to Teeno's room so he could join the meeting. Although it was a meeting that welcomed the new member, it didn't become a formal conversation because of the party they had last night. Thanks to that, it wasn't hard for Teeno to get along with the members.

"Yesterday, Viscount Paros made another request."

Haroon talked about the request without hiding anything. The members' faces became serious when listening. They desperately looked for someone to talk to first, and

naturally, they looked at Philip, as he was the one who talked the most with their boss.

“So what’s your view on this, Boss?” Philip asked, out of pressure.

There was slight sense of anxiety in his voice. There was something he was afraid of.

“Let’s accept his request. I was planning to go to County of Jorlen anyways, and Huk’ran Mountains happens to be on the way. Hall may be a cold, quiet person, but what can you say about that. We’re heading their anyways, and what’s wrong about earning some money along the way?”

“It’s not about who our V.I.P. is, Boss! The Huk’ran Mountains are dangerous! It’s a forbidden place full of mo-monsters that came out of Hell!” Gitan shouted, protesting.

Serinn and Ritrina seemed unsettled as well. Haroon expected it to be somewhat dangerous, since Devron and Viscount Paros has mentioned it a few times, but he didn’t expected it to be so dangerous, that it would scare his members. But Haroon needed to head there.

‘The trace of the Legendary Throwing Knife Master is known to remain somewhere on the mountain. I was gonna go alone anyways.’

But that wasn’t what he told his members.

“Our skill is nowhere near ‘pro’. If we were to become popular as mercenaries and gain fame and fortune, we need to train harder, and learn to use mana in a short time. If I am right, the strong monsters of Huk’ran mountains would be the perfect training opponents for us.”

Then the members thought about it for a second, only to shook their heads.

Some were born as a son or daughter of great mercenaries, and they all decided to walk the path their parents walked on. Of course, they wanted to be great mercenaries with all their hearts. They just didn’t like how they had to fight the monsters that were talked of as legends.

Of course, it wasn’t easy for the others to risk their life like Haroon could.

“That’s true, but...”

Serinn tried to oppose, but Haroon happened to speak at the same time, accidentally cutting off her words in the middle of her sentence.

“Don’t you remember how weak I was? I was able to get strong in a short time only because I risked my life for training. You might not know, but I could have died back in the camp a few times. Of course, we could get to some point by slaying monsters and brigands. That’s what people do, usually. But we are still young! We can always challenge ourselves. When are we going to overcome the others if we train with the same pace as the others?”

It was true. To them, Haroon was like a monster. They didn’t remember how he looked when they first met, but they’ve seen how fast he was able to get strong. They compared themselves to an egg, and Haroon to a bird.

The hatred and jealousy they had towards Haroon came from the envy of his growth. They used to think they were great, who tried their best when training their bodies and skills even at a very young age, under the education of great parents. But Haroon overcame them in just three months. And now he was telling them it was possible because he was risking his life.

“But are you really sure about this?” Philip asked.

“Hahaha, don’t you know me?”

Philip nodded upon hearing that. He knew Haroon didn’t have lots of words, but his will and fighting spirit was next to none. Philip knew very well how Haroon strives, once the goal is set.

Teeno was the first one to speak up.

“Alright. I’m going with you. It isn’t like I have a family to return to, nor anyone who’s awaiting me, so I want to travel places where no one would even dare to. I have nothing to lose, and I see nothing wrong with satisfying my curiosity by doing it.”

“Teeno.”

“I’m impressed by your bravery, Boss. I recall myself back in my young age when I used to be a pathfinders for the mercenaries or esquires. I really loved doing that. Finding

the path that no one knows, always facing new dangers... Nothing can be compared to the thrill of that. Just like in the old 'ime, I can feel my heart pounding hard, awaiting for the thrill. Now I'm ashamed of myself that I've been excusing myself for being weak and old."

Teeno made a happy smile. Although it was full of wrinkles and sunburn, yet his eyes were just like a youth's.

"Alright, Boss. Let's do this!" Philip shouted, biting his lips.

Philip was the most talented one among the party. At first, he was cooperating only because of the strange sickness he got. But then, he realized he had something to learn from Haroon. More than that, the oldest member of The Gusts of Wind had shown his bravery, and that motivated him.

"I don't want to be behind someone, never again. If I train like you do, Boss, I wouldn't be losing so easily as the last time," said Philip.

"Then I'd join as well. And not because of the sickness I've got. It's because I think it'd be fun if I'm with you, Boss. I've seen lots of mercenaries, but you ARE different. Well, yeah, I'm a bit afraid of dying but I hate living a boring life. I'm kind of excited when thinking of going to that kind of dangerous places. I think I peed a little bit just by thinking of it," said Ritrina.

Serinn and Gitan looked at her with a strange look, and said at the same time.

"You are mad!"

"I am! But this is more thrilling, isn't it? It'd be much better than dealing with weak Goblins or bandits! Just imagine it! Fighting freaking giant monsters!"

Serinn and Gitan shook their heads, but they seemed rather relaxed.

"Then I'll join as well. I'm disappointed that I had to take a job that my beauty and refinement doesn't deserve, but what can I say when my fighting skills haven't been so useful? But let me show you my true skills this time!"

Serinn stopped there, but Haroon knew there were something more than that. Her eyes were burning with revenge, with determination to show that she doesn't deserve

to do all the shitty labour. But Haroon didn't care.

'Yeah, do prove yourself, or not. It's not like I'll live with you.'

For the Quad Wankers, Haroon's carefree, relaxed attitude toward them came as a weird sense of relaxation. His firm, solid attitude was somewhat trustworthy.

"D-damn! Then I'll go with you as well."

"Yeah, you are so brave that you can't sleep alone, after all. What a bear you are," Serinn whined.

"Hah! I'm not like the old Gitan! I even learned shield skills!" Gitan answered.

Gitan's voice had some glimpse of confidence. His eyes were still shaking from fear, though.

"Well, then let's repair our gear and purchase the things we need. Viscount Paros has permitted us to use his own blacksmith workshop for a discounted price."

The party headed to the workshop right away. As it produces weapons and armor for the entire viscounty, skilled blacksmiths were working in shifts.

The party was able to find good weapons, not from the properly displayed items. Gitan was able to find a big shield among the dumpsters that the blacksmiths were about to re-smelt.

The shield was big enough for Gitan to hide his body, and it was bent outward from the center, making it easier for the user to parry the weapons. Because it was made with steel, it was as heavy as a man, but Gitan could still use it with one hand.

"Hahaha, I love it!"

It was simple, and it had no decoration nor any symbols on it, but it still looked good on Gitan.

A small, round shield was given to Serinn, which could be equipped on her wrist. She needed one as she was the weakest one of the party. Haroon purchased five short knives for skinning and cooking.

Haroon, Philip, Ritrina and Teenoo didn't need to buy a new weapon. They could, but it wouldn't come cheap.

"Well, those definitely aren't our best weapons..." said the workshop manager.

The workshop manager seemed disappointed that the party chose low-quality weapons.

"Well, how much is it?"

"I see you've chose some items from the dumpster, and as there was a word from his Honor, Viscount Paros, We'll only receive 50 gold."

Just as the Viscount told him, the manager only asked for the material fee.

"Ah, and please take a look at our weapons as well."

Haroon untied his sword from his belt and handed it to the manager. The others did the same thing. The manager inspected their weapons.

"They aren't too damaged. Since you are our special guests, we'll repair and sharpen these for free."

That made the members smile. Buying new gear is expensive, but managing it costs a lot as well. But that only lasted for a moment for Gitan and Serinn.

"Gitan and Serinn, I'll be deducting the costs of your shields from you wage."

The news surprised them.

"Boss!"

"What kind of nonsense is that?" Gitan and Serinn spoke at the same time.

"What, do I have to buy you the gear that'll save your own life?"

That silenced them. Buying gear and weapons were each member's own responsibility. That was the mercenaries' rule, so they had nothing to say.

They had another thing to get done before they departed for the quest. They were told that they still had 3 days to prepare as Hall had something else to do, so they had enough time to do what Haroon thought of last night.

On the next day, Haroon called the members to his room after having breakfast.

“Teeno, is it true that there’s a Hall of Warriors in this castle?”

“Yes. Actually, there are three of them.”

Similar to the idea of Tower to Magicians, Warriors had their own organizations called The Hall of Warriors. To preserve these halls from the ravages of time, they were build on top of families who inherited their skills and passed them on to their descendants. Causing each group to be specialized in one way or another.

This feature wasn’t known to the users yet. The Hall of Warriors taught skill instead of pressing skill books. In order to learn a skill or two from them, the trainee needed to fulfill physical requirements and talents. The reason that it wasn’t known to the users yet was because of this – that there were no users that fulfilled these two requirements yet.

The Hall of Warriors had a lot of talented commoners as members, and their skill was quite different from the Knights, who had self-calling high-level swordsmanship.

The reason that the Royal Knightages were not able to chase the party was because of these Halls of Warriors. Most of the knights that Viscount Paros owned were from these Halls of Warriors. At least that’s what Devron told him.

“Is it true that you can learn skills from there?”

“Yes, as long as you are eligible and able to pay the fee for it.”

“And how about the level of skills?”

“If you aren’t registering as a member, they usually only teach the lowest one. But since it’s their tradition to teach only those who are eligible, even their lowest skill is quite good. It’s rare, but they sometimes teach their advanced skills too, as long as the student is qualified.”

“Sounds good.”

“But why do you bring that up...?”

Teeno’s question was exactly what the Quad Wankers wanted to ask.

“Philip’s Smashing Blow skill is almost complete, and I think it is time for him to learn an advanced one. The others have only mastered basic skills, but I think it’ll be good enough to be recognized by the Hall of Warriors. I hope this will be a good chance for all of you. You included, Teeno.”

“B-Boss!”

Teeno’s eyes widened. They had no idea that Haroon had been thinking of this. He has never seen nor heard of any mercenary guild leader who gives that much attention to each member’s skills.

“Boss, You’re not joking, right?” Said Philip, deeply moved.

“We all need to prepare. There is only one way to ride and overcome the impending wave of chaos – getting strong.”

Gitan, Serinn, and Ritrina didn’t fully understand what he just said, but were excited anyways.

“Then let’s head there first. The qualified ones will be getting an easy chance, and the others will have to find their own ways.”

“B-but learning a skill would cost few dozens of gold...” Teeno said with concern.

“I’ve got you guys covered. Don’t worry about the money. We might get a little short on the supplies, but we can always harvest herbs and hunt monsters, so that shouldn’t be a problem.”

“I, I can’t appreciate you more, Boss!” Said Teeno.

“Thank you, Boss. I never thought you would be caring for us that much. Even if I don’t get a chance to learn a skill, I won’t forget your kindness.”

“Well, don’t jinx it and let’s head to the Hall of Warriors to test our luck and skill.”

[The members are thanking you with all their heart.]

[You have gained 150 leadership points, and every member has gained 300 loyalty.]

Haroon was once again surprised by the level of detail the developers of Beyond has achieved.

The unexpected gift made Teeno’s mind even lighter, causing him to move faster, and thanks to that, it didn’t take long for them to arrive to one of the three Hall of Warrior.

The first one they visited had a giant shield nicely painted on the gate. The party found the painting quite odd. It wasn’t an ordinary shield, but it had blades sticking out from the shield, creating a scary theme.

“We’ve came to test our qualities,” Teenno shouted at the gate.

The gate was already opened, and the party could see an empty training hall and a simple but long wooden building at the end of it. Someone came out from the building.

“He looks like an ogre.”

Like how Serinn whispered, the man had a giant body that was similar to an ogre. Oddly, he was quite fast, probably because of his wide stride. When he came near to them, they could see that he was wearing unusual armor.

There were blades attached to the armor. It seemed more like they made blades from by sharpening the armor. The blades were formed on shoulders, elbows, buttock, back and chest. It looked ridiculous, but soon they realized it’ll be ridiculously effective in close-range combat.

Without a word, he looked over each member with an intense gaze, as if he was scanning their bodies. With a carefree and emotionless face his gaze was quite horrifying. Even Serinn and Ritrina had to avoid his eyes.

His eyes stopped on Gitan, who was hiding behind Haroon and Philip.

“We can get you in. Hey, you! Pay 50 gold.”

He was pointing at Gitan. Gitan was knocking his knees already.

“We were lucky. We had a qualifying one.”

Haroon handed the man 50 gold without any hesitation.

“Follow me. The training will take a week.”

The man didn’t even check if Gitan was following him, and headed inside.

“B-Boss, I’m scared.”

And everyone in party could tell, even if he didn’t mention it.

“Train hard. Who knows? Maybe you would be able to slain an orc with a single blow after training.”

“R-Really?”

What a kid.

“You can do it. Just see how big you are. So train hard, and come back to the Viscount’s mansion after a week.”

Gitan was still shaking, but he clenched his fists hard enough to make his hands pale. Though he may be a cowardly one, it didn’t mean he was not ready to be a proper warrior. But seeing him walking into the Hall of Warriors was just like a pig going into the butcher’s house.

“I wonder what he’ll learn,” Serinn said to Philip.

“I have no idea.”

“I’d say shield techniques.”

As soon as Philip spoke, Teeno answered his question.

“People say you can tell from the symbol on the gate.”

“Hmm.”

That actually explained a lot for them.

“Well then, let’s check out the next one,” Teeno suggested.

Because Teenno knew the layout of Viscounty castle so well, it didn’t take long for them to check all three Hall of Warriors. Philip got into the one which had the symbol of a slim, sharp sword. Teenno and Ritrina were able to get into the one with the symbol of a sword that was flying.

Serinn got upset that she never got accepted by any Hall of Warriors. In fact, both Halls of Warriors found Haroon qualifying. He simply refused. Serinn was the only one who was not chosen.

“Don’t think about it. There were only three of them here anyways. We can always check the next city.”

Haroon tried to cheer her up. After going through pain and happiness together, he couldn’t dislike her anymore. But that didn’t help her. On the way back to the guesthouse of Viscount Paros, Serinn sobbed over and over in sorrow, so Haroon had to help her walk. When they got to the guesthouse, Haroon sent her to her room and came out to the outer castle. There was one more thing he needed to take care of. He was going to exchange gold before the exchange rate dropped even lower.

The total money he earned after starting Beyond was 656 gold and 10 silver. He has spent 50 gold on Hector, 50 gold on purchasing weapons, and 150 gold on the Halls of Warriors. So he had 406 gold in inventory.

If Bell’s prediction is right, then after about a month in real time, the exchange rate would stabilize at around \$20~\$30 per gold. In worst case scenario, it’ll drop to \$10 per gold. It was always better to exchange it to cash as soon as possible.

Most of it was from the Quad Wankers, but they were rich anyways. And now he was trying to pay it back, so he wasn’t feeling guilty about it anymore.

Haroon visited a bank, and only changed 400 gold.

‘Damn! I should have come earlier!’

The exchange rate had already dropped to about \$60 per gold. It meant the trading system was now being vitalized as the number of users and their levels rises.

‘Still, that’s \$24000,’ Haroon thought.

An average civilian in district F would have to work for 10 years to earn that much money. He earned it just in two months. ‘This is too much for me’ he thought, but he didn’t even know where to spend that much money. But knowing how expensive the herbs – especially the wild ginseng – were, he realized that it wasn’t enough.

‘I might get another chance to earn this much money if I train hard. I am satisfied by being able to play games for 2 months without having any job,’ he added.

While heading back to the guest house, Haroon turned around and left the castle. He didn’t care to hear Serinn cry for several days. He thought it’d be much better to spend time on training instead.



The old sun was setting for the fifth day after the members began training.

For the last few days, Haroon had been training his Messenger Walking skill on the plain field near the riverside, which was full of thick, tall grass. He couldn’t care any more about his training as he knew the effects of it. He was mentally exhausted, but he couldn’t stop observing how the mana capacity increased continually.

Thanks to his efforts of walking non-stop, he’s gained 3 stats for sustenance, and 3 stats for focus. He even gained 2 stats for Extrasensory Perception as he had to focus on the breathing and movement of muscles.

That wasn’t the end.

As he was solely focusing on training the skill, he was able to level up the Messenger Walking skill in a short time. When the darkness was gently covering the tall grass, he was able to hear a UI sound, alerting the level up.

[You have leveled up the Messenger Walking skill]

[You have unlocked a skill – ‘Messenger Running’]

Messenger Running

Messenger Running is a skill that utilizes the mana that is being absorbed through your feet. On the absorbing stage, you can now choose to absorb or spurt mana back, shooting your body forward at full speed. Mana will not be accumulated during the running stage.

It was surprising to hear the news from the UI sound. The system of Beyond didn't tell users if they have leveled up their skills. He never heard from the UI sound that he had leveled up Sense Sword nor the other two throwing knife skills. This only meant Messenger Skills are exceptional.

‘Messenger Running? So the Messenger Walking skill does have other skills related to it as it levels up, just like Bell guessed. I can't believe how a skill can be evolved to different skills.’

When he first learned the skill from Devron, he was fascinated by the fact that he could accumulate mana just by walking, as he was always short of mana because of how much mana Brat has to consume. Moreover, Haroon was able to move twice as fast when he uses Messenger Walking, and his mana capacity was increasing slightly so he couldn't afford to spend less time on training the skill.

‘So Bell's guess was right.’

Haroon was surprised by Bell's ability once again.

Bell was mainly doing 3 things while Haroon was living his life in Beyond.

The first was learning about the world. What she told him was that she connects to the Whole Global Committee(WGC)'s electronic library online and absorbed knowledge from it. Just by hearing the name of it, Haroon expected it to have an exceptional security system, and wondered how she managed to get into it. But he realized, that wasn't his business after all.

The second was making a physical copy of herself. Not cyborgs where parts or the

whole body is made out of mechanical parts, but a biological body that can still connect to the capsule, which is her main body. That seemed impossible in common sense, but he had already seen a physical shell of Bell that wasn't any hologram of some sort.

The third was searching for intel on Beyond and predicting where it is heading. This task was crucial for Haroon. The quality and amount of it could not be compared to the intelligence she was gaining due to limited sources, and she had to wait until Haroon logs out. So her current goal was to be able to transfer data via brainwave.

So she must have managed to figure out the skill system, based on the facts that users has been posting on the internet.

– “The details are too specific, even considering that it is a passive skill. It is too massive to be a simple passive.”

That's what she told him a few days ago when she heard Haroon bragging about the new skill he learned, when he was still out of the game because of the game penalty.

“Is that so? Well, yeah, I still don't understand why it needs a description of every movement in great detail, but isn't it amazing that you can accumulate mana just by walking?”

– “I don't think it is that simple, Oppa,” said Bell, tilting her head.

“How can you tell?”

– “The other skills I've analyzed on the internet didn't have great details with this much volume. The passive skills that need to be trained physically, filtered to advanced levels, have a volume of description which is less than one third of what you've just told me.”

Haroon told her his opinion, partially agreeing to Bell's analysis.

“Wouldn't that be simply because the skill needs delicate movements? Probably because it is related to the breathing.”

– “Yes it could be. But it is my perspective, the skill seems to be made out of several, even more detailed skills. Of course, it might be hard to guess what those exactly are,

but it is my guess that they will be revealed as you understand the skill more.”

“Haha, that’ll be awesome. I hope that you are right.”

And she was right.

‘Messenger Running, huh...’

Haroon thought about it, but could not think of anything else than that it has evolved from walking to running.

‘Let’s think about it after casting it.’

If one cannot picture something mentally, one should experience it with the body first.

Haroon started walking slowly by matching the breathe and the movement. He could feel light amounts of mana being gathered around the sole of his feet.

‘Let’s run!’

As the image of running at full speed came across his head, Haroon kicked the ground with his toes. The body leaned towards the ground with great angle. It was quite an unstable pose which looked like he would fall over at any second. He was leaping about 2 meters, but the height of his jump wasn’t so high.

As the heel touches the ground, he gently tilted his foot so the sole would fully contact with the ground, and quickly kicked off the ground with his toes again. Just as he did a moment ago, he was leaping another 2 meters.

It was the very next moment that he realized the distance he just covered by two steps, causing him to lose the balance of movement and breathing.

“What the hell was that?”

It was simply unbelievable. He couldn’t believe that he moved 2 meters per step. Yet, he felt his body being so light, that it felt more like hovering rather than running.

‘The mana did burst out of my feet.’

At the moment when his feet made full contact with the ground, the mana was gathered at his feet. But when he kicked off the ground with his toes, the mana boosted him forward, making a whirl-like movement and bursting out of his feet. But there was something odd about it. If he supposed that the amount of mana he gathered is 1 unit the amount of mana that boosted him was more than 5 units. But it didn't feel like he has used the mana that he accumulated.

At first, he thought he wasn't understanding the flow of mana – where he accumulates mana and how to effectively use it – in his body, but it simply didn't feel like he has used his mana.

'Could it be related to the whirl-like movement it made?'

Maybe. The feeling he had with Mana was quite similar to flow of air. Then it explained how the whirl-like movement could release more energy.

'That's simply amazing. I could run like the wind!'

Haroon suppressed his excited mind and calmed down, trying to match the breathing and movement. After a few failed attempts, he was able to focus once again.

Because of the 3 stats of focus he newly gained from the training he had done for the last few days, he was able to look around while still casting the messenger walking, and running.

Although it might be an odd pose, Haroon's running stance was quite similar to a horse's running. Well, it couldn't be compared to a horse, as he wasn't losing any stamina while running. He was gaining momentum from mana, not from his muscle power.

A man running on the darkened grass field was a mysterious view, more like an arcane scene. Sadly, there was no one to witness it.

Chapter 9

Meeting Rumm

On the sixth day after the members of The Gusts of Wind entered the Hall of Warriors, Haroon's footsteps were heading towards the Grand Plaza, where they hadn't been for the last few days. He was satisfied with training as he had leveled up the Messenger Walking skill, so he got a sudden interest in meeting other users.

'My members will return by tomorrow, so why don't I go to a hunting ground?'

He realized he had never been to a proper hunting ground even though he was playing a game as a user. He decided to spend that day on the hunting ground, joining a party if he could.

On the way to the Grand Plaza, he paid a visit to a mercenary office and checked if there was any requests he could take, but there were none he could do alone in one day. He requested delivering a few letters, and exited the office, enjoying the peaceful view of the viscount castle. He passed the chaotic Grand Plaza where the users were opening their own stalls, and headed towards the hunting ground.

"Excuse me, are you a user?"

Someone's voice stopped his carefree steps. Haroon could see a swordsman when he turned back, who seemed to be the same age as him. The guy who stopped him had a vivid face, which was very likeable. The orc leather armor set and extraordinary steel sword on his back told Haroon that the guy had quite a high level, and made him wonder why the guy would stop someone low-leveled like him, but answered anyways.

"Well, I am. Is there something I can help you with...?"

"You wanna join our party?"

A sudden party request offered from a stranger.

“Your party? Well, I don’t think I can be of any help to you as my level is so low. You know, I’ve just got into a class,” Haroon replied.

He got interested by the word ‘party’, but refused politely. He was only level 17, and the parties he could join would be scrappy noob parties. If he were to join a proper party, he would at least need to get to level 20.

“Level doesn’t matter much.”

“Is that so?”

Haroon still didn’t know the reason, but the guy seemed rather honest, and the guy’s carefree attitude did trigger his interest.

“Excuse me.”

The guy drew closer and whispered in Haroon’s ear.

“Let me be honest with you. I found an unregistered dungeon, and it’s a party dungeon. We tried to meet the minimum requirement by inviting friends, we even recruited a priest from the temple, and we still lack a person.”

A party dungeons’ difficulty was at least C. If a party doesn’t have 9 people or more, entering the dungeon itself will be denied. If the guy’s words were true, it was Haroon’s lucky day. He hadn’t heard anything about unregistered dungeons from Bell. While it was true he hasn’t been logging out often, he thought it was probably because classes like map makers or finders has not appeared yet.

“But why me, though...?”

“Well, we were looking for a user in the plaza, and we noticed you coming out from the mercenary office. My friends thought that you’re an NPC, but I had a strange feeling that you’re a user, so we made a bet to see if you were a user or not. Hahaha, and I won the bet, thanks to you.”

‘Really?’

He never thought he would draw the attention of anyone, so it was quite a strange sensation. When he was attending a school in District B, his short height and timid

personality helped him with being nobody.

“But still, didn’t you need someone who’s practically useful?”

“Not really, and I simply liked my first impression of you. Don’t get me wrong, but I felt some kind of charisma contrasted by your lone, cold appearance.”

“Hahaha.”

Haroon smiled from his compliment.

“In fact, my friends’ abilities are somewhat high, so it’s quite uncomfortable for us to invite someone with a high level, and we thought it’d be better if we could find someone to get along with.”

Basically saying the only reason they’re inviting Haroon to their party was because they’re interested by their first impression of him.

‘Does that mean they are that innocent? Or are they that confident?’

It was unpleasant to hear that they didn’t care how skillful Haroon was, but it wasn’t so offending. After all, he had some time to kill until the members came back from the Hall of Warriors.

Haroon had no reason to refuse the invitation as all he wanted to do is experience the ordinary user’s playstyle. Moreover, they were heading to an unregistered dungeon, which meant they’ll be levelling up more easily, and they might be able to get some good items.

“Sounds good. Just don’t expect much from me then. I won’t say thank you for inviting me. The name’s Haroon.”

“That means I don’t have to say thank you for joining then? It’s Meshrumm. You can call me Rumm, though. Well then, why don’t we head to the cafe over there where our party is waiting?”

The two made their way through the crowd, and headed to an open-air cafe that was next to the road that lead to the gate of the castle. It was about a distance of 20 to 30 steps.

“Just to let you know, we are all from the same university with same majors. Everyone is different and have quite strong characteristic, but I promise they are not bad people at all. We’ll try our best, but bear with us if you feel left out.”

“I see. I envy that though, playing games with friends. And don’t worry about it, I can understand.”

“Hah! It’s the moment of truth!” Rumm proudly shouted at them.

The faces of the party members who were sitting at tables, separated into two groups, were already changing from seeing the two coming towards them.

“Just tell us what the trick is, Rumm.”

“I know right? What made you think he is a user?”

Complaining, Rumm’s friends took silvers out of their pockets and tossed them to Rumm. Some even threw at him, but Rumm was able to catch all 7 of them with quick movements.

“Well guys, this is Haroon,” Rumm introduced him to the party.

“Nice to meet you. The name’s Haroon. It hasn’t been long since I got a class, and this is my first time to play in a party, so I hope I can learn a lot from you guys.”

Five of the party members stood up to greet him. Two of the ones who were still sitting were scanning him with strange looks, and the last one didn’t even care.

The first one who greeted him was a magician. He was a handsome man, but seemed somewhat bold and arrogant.

“I’m Maron. The level is 39, and I’m walking on the path of Mana.”

He’s probably the type of person who can’t stay in the background, or the leader of the party. Maybe both. Seeing his attitude and language, Haroon could tell that he was a noble in real life.

“I’m Mentosa, level 32 Swordsman. I’m the tanker of the party.”

“Minerva. I’m a level 29 archeress. It is nice to meet you.”

“Tess. I’m a magician. Level’s 33.”

“Same level, I’m swordsman Yeo’myeong¹.”

Mentosa was a rough fellow, who had a greatsword on his back. Haroon initially thought he was a tough, temperous man. He realized he was wrong when he heard his voice.

Archeress Minerva and Swordsman² Tess were ladies with completely different images. Minerva was a beautiful lady who seemed warm and open. Tess seemed cold and sharp like a blade. Swordsman Yeo’myeong was slim like a woman, and had sharp eyes, but weren’t as sharp as Tess’s.

Their level was so much higher than Haroon’s. To reach such a level as students, unlike Haroon who live in the game, they must have started playing Beyond in the initial stage.

“Hey, Are you not gonna be in the party with us?”

Rumm was disappointed by his two friends who still weren’t standing up, and berated them, turning his face red. The voice got loud in the meantime, but they were just looking at Haroon.

“I was just not sure how a user who has never joined a party could enter the mercenary office freely, if he is not an NPC. Isn’t that odd, Mr. Haroon?”

“That’s what I mean. That’s odd.”

The two must be doubting Haroon’s identity. They weren’t wrong, as that’s what most of the users thought.

“Well, this is my stat window. Help yourselves.”

Haroon opened his stat window and displayed it so they could check it.

Name: Haroon

Race: Human

Class: Swordsman

Level: 17

Title: Hidden by the user.

He had already set things on private mode just in case he got into a party. He hid stats and skills because he didn't need to show them. All he had to prove was that he hasn't lied about the level, and that he is a user.

"I was able to enter the mercenary guild building because of the request I made. No matter how low the level is, anyone can enter the building if they had something to request."

The two stood up from their places upon hearing Haroon's words and seeing the status window, with an expression of sorry on their face. In fact, Haroon requested sending mails to Instructor Hector and Elser, so he wasn't lying.

"I'm Mir³. Level's 33, and I'm working on the path of mana. I'm terribly sorry about what I said just a moment ago. I didn't know that was a thing."

"I'm Dasom⁴. Level 30 Assassin, but not any good at it yet. To be honest, I suspected that you were hiding something from us, as I never knew one could easily enter the mercenary guild office building. To add, Rumm is moody and naive who easily gets tricked so... I'm really sorry!"

Seeing how Dasom talks, Haroon imagined if she was the girlfriend of Rumm. Haroon realized these two were more normal than the others. These two was able to catch odds from a stranger, when the others only cared about the bet they lost.

"Don't worry about it. I understand. It is nice to meet you two."

Haroon didn't really mind it. It wasn't even something to keep in mind, after all. But Rumm seemed uneasy from the actions of the ladies, as if he was the one who was distrusting.

"And she is Lace, she was the last one who joined the party before you. She is the priest I mentioned earlier. She's Tess's older sister, by the way. She meditates whenever she can, so that's why she hasn't noticed you yet. Don't mind too much about her not

greeting you.”

Lace opened her eyes. She probably heard what Rumm just said. Her deep, dark pupils held Haroon’s image for a second.

“Excuse me. I’m Lace, a priest.”

“Nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you, too. By the way, is there any reason that you are hiding the titles?”

“Huh?”

She saw the stat window already? She noticed something that the others haven’t. Considering her question, she was an extraordinary person.

“I just didn’t feel like showing them.”

“Is that so? Fair enough... Anyways, it is great to have you in our party. I didn’t feel alright until you joined the party. I never knew Rumm had the eye to find a good person. I was underestimating him, to be honest.”

The party realized she wasn’t talking to Haroon when she spoke her last sentence.

Lace’s level was the highest of the party, she played for the longest time, except Haroon. Moreover, priest was a class that helps the others where solo’ing was almost impossible, so she had lots of experience in meeting other players. So words from Lace on people had more weight than anyone in the party.

Her ambiguous words that implied she found out something that the others hadn’t made the others look at Haroon once again. Just as Lace implied, they could see something different from him that they couldn’t see because of the preconception they had upon hearing the level 17.

As the mood was getting heavier, Rumm quickly spoke out to lighten it up.

“Well, then! Let’s get moving. Now that we’ve got enough members, let’s head to the dungeon and enjoy the rights of the first discoverer!”

Rumm, the life of the party, made everyone's faces bright again.

"Wait, Haroon isn't in the party yet. Maron, it's your turn," said Rumm.

"Oh, right. Give me a sec."

[You have received a message. Would you like to check it now?]

"Yes."

[Party 'KO-1 Top' has invited you. Would you like to accept the invitation?]

"Yes."

These users must be living in KO-1 Union, just like Haroon. It didn't matter as they were meeting in a game, but Haroon felt a deeper connection when meeting someone from the same Union. Naturally, he felt uneasy by having Maron in the party as he was a noble, but he decided to think positively because of Rumm.

[You are now a member of KO-1 Top party. Experience points will now be gained as a party, and will be distributed depending on how much each contributes. Item distribution is on manual mode, and it won't affect solo-kills. Party chat is now activated.]

With a simple procedure, Haroon joined the party.



The destination they were heading was the Nenond mountain. According to someone, although Haroon didn't remember exactly who it was, it would take about an hour by walking. Fortunately, they didn't see even the glimpse of a monster on the way. The dungeon was located near a path that merchants usually take, so the guards of the Viscounty of Paros regularly hunted the monsters.

On the way, the members of KO-1 Top party shared information and planned out the strategy. Although he didn't want to, Haroon never got the chance to join the conversation. Maron treated Haroon as if he wasn't there. The others were ignoring him just as Maron was doing, excluding Rumm and Lace.

Just as Rumm told him, He was just someone who filled the number. His ability as a level 17 wouldn't benefit the party much anyways. Of course, Haroon didn't mind it at all. It was what he expected, and it was obvious to them. Haroon was just lucky, they had not choice as they needed to fill the numbers.

Haroon simply followed them, quietly practicing Messenger Walking, so the body would get used to it. Since he learned that Messenger Walking works in real life as well, he decided to make his body learn it so that he can cast it automatically. On the way, Lace came near Haroon and asked.

"I can see that the way you walk is quite unusual. You are walking uphill as if you were walking on the plain land."

"Really? Maybe I got used to walking way too much."

Haroon dismissed the question without revealing that he was, in fact, using a skill. Lace's facial expression changed a bit as if she felt his answer was halfhearted.

"About what happened earlier, I'm sorry that I suspected you. I think I got carried away as I and the others are friends already. You know, we didn't really have time to find someone we know, so we had to find someone we could trust."

It seemed she misunderstood Haroon, that he was still upset about it.

"Like I said earlier, I don't really mind it so you don't have worry about it."

"I have to say, that's a really unusual walking style that you use. It looks like you are walking without putting in any effort. The others are tired already, but you seem really, relaxed."

She wasn't just saying that to have a conversation with him. She really seemed interested in the way he walks. Anyways, Lace was paying attention to Haroon too much, abnormally so.

"Is it? I really don't know what you mean."

"Huhu, it seems you really don't want to talk with me."

She pulled back the hood that she was wearing over her eyes. Her lustrous, coal-black

hair fell over her shoulder like a waterfall, and her entire face was revealed. Crystal-like eyes and an impeccable face dazed Haroon. He had never seen a beautiful lady like her before.

“You are beautiful.”

“Huhu, am I? I don’t think you really mean it. I can tell from your voice and expression.”

Haroon feared showing his timid, introspective personality, so he has been talking coldly without showing any expressions on his face. That must be why she thought so.

“I really mean it. I’m quite timid, so I can’t really control my face when I see a beautiful lady. I don’t have a trick to pretend not to be interested, nor courage to admire the beauty.”

“Hahaha.”

She found his words funny, so she laughed, widely opening her mouth.

“You are more honest than I thought. I thought you were a man with many secrets, since you were hiding your titles.”

“Haha.”

Haroon simply laughed at it, as he didn’t really have anything to say. Then he got curious about why she revealed her face.

“It’s because of trouble I made earlier. You seem different so I thought it’d be good to get to know you. That’s why I revealed my face. No other reasons.”

She read his thought through his eyes, and explained even though he didn’t ask for it. It wasn’t something he expected to be answered, but he could see that she was good at reading one’s mind.

“I felt something, intense that I’ve never felt before, when you were coming with Rumm. It felt like you were a lone wolf, who wanders around the wilderness, swanning around.”

“Maybe you are right about a lone wolf. Not about being intense, though. Maybe you

felt it that way because I'm a loner in the real world."

"I was moved, to be honest. Some ladies do find a lone man charismatic, you know?"

"Huhuhu, that's quite an honor."

Haroon was more honest this time. It was the first time he heard such phrase from a lady, so he got a little excited, but it was a bit scary too. It felt like he was revealing his naked body.

"Let me introduce myself again. I'm 22, and my real name is Hwayeon. I'm a third-year student of the KO-1 Union Top University. It's the uni we attend."

Haroon had nothing to say. It was his first time to hear someone's real name in a VR game.

"Some say relationships made in virtual reality is a fake one, but I don't think so. At least not in Beyond, as it doesn't feel like it is a virtual reality. This is a precious part of my life, my second life really. And I believe the relationship I make here can be continued in real life as well."

"Well, I do agree that Beyond is another reality."

Haroon nodded.

"And I'm really curious what kind of person you are. Don't get me wrong though. No one has drawn my interest like you did. And it's not like I'm putting a move on you. I'm simply interested in you as a person."

There are people with similar personalities. This type of person has appeared once again. Nemion, a girl he met in the mercenary camp, was like her

Haroon himself could feel that she wasn't putting any moves on him. Reflecting the situation on his experience with meeting Nemion, Lace was simply having an innocent and pure interest for what kind of person Haroon is.

"Well, I'm a jobless, 19 year-old man. I know you are older than me, but I wouldn't address you as 'Nuna'.⁵ You know, people say you have to be careful of things like that in male-female relationship. You don't know what would happen."

“Huhuhu, you are right on that. Age is just a number between male and female. My parents too, have a 3-year difference in their age.”

She smiled at Haroon’s words. Haroon saw a hazy dimple and a crooked tooth. He preferred cuteness over beauty.

“You gotta be extra careful from now on!” Rumm shouted at the members.

“Are we there yet, Rumm?” Somebody asked.

“Nope. The dungeon is at the end of this thorn bush forest,” Rumm replied.

Haroon could see a forest made out of thorn bushes that were as tall as a man. Haroon was surprised that someone actually went through this forest. Rumm saw people were getting curious, so he explained.

“Well, I was looking for a place for No.1... Then I found the dungeon.”

Everyone laughed at it. This wasn’t the kind of a place that people could find just by coincidence. This party really got lucky on this, as there was no official dungeons announced.

The party made their way through the bushes, jostling away thorned branches and leaves with their swords. They knew it’d be way simpler if they cut branches, but they were afraid that the other users would find the dungeon by chance.

When they had pressed their way through for about 10 minutes, they found a cliff. On one side of the cliff, there was a cave with a big entrance, presumably the entrance of the dungeon. While the others were resting, checking their weapons before combat, Rumm came to Haroon as if he was sorry that he couldn’t care much for Haroon.

“Mr. Haroon. That’s the dungeon I mentioned.”

“I see. It seems quite extraordinary.”

“I know right? At first I didn’t dare to step in at all, but when I did, it told me it was a party dungeon.”

“No one has claimed they’ve found a dungeon as far as I know. That’s awesome work you’ve made.”

Rumm smiled proudly.

“Haha, and thanks to that, I now have a subject to write my report on.”

“You must be majoring in something related to Games, I presume?”

“You are right. I major in Computer A.I. Engineering. Lace majors it, too. I saw you two getting along well. Tess has been looking at you two strangely. Have you noticed?”

Haroon liked how blandly Rumm talks. His bright face and cheerful personality was completely opposite to him, but he liked being with Rumm.

“She seemed like a good person.”

“By the way, how old are you...?”

“I became an adult this year.”

“So you must be 19? I’m the same age to you!”

Rumm must have thought that Haroon was older than him, seeing how Lace got along with Haroon very well. Haroon’s lone atmosphere must have made him seem older as well. Haroon felt sorry for some reason.

“Well, I do look older. I admit that.”

Rumm waved his hands.

“No, no. Not at all. It is our fault that we presumed your age. Well, since we are the same age, do you mind if I speak rather informally?”⁶

“Not at all.”

“Ahaha. Alright, that makes things easier. My name’s Moon’Hee.”

“It’s Haroon. I don’t really use the real name anymore. I just like to be called that way.”

“Fair enough. Where do you live?”

“District F. Why though?”

Haroon coldly replied, realizing that even Rumm couldn't avoid asking where Haroon was from. But despite what Haroon expected, he could see that Rumm was yearning the life Haroon was living.

“Nah, I just thought your atmosphere suits it. Is that true that people there have a lot of stories?”

“That's just a stereotype. At least that's no to people near me.”

Rumm seemed even more interested in Haroon, even though he revealed that he was from District F. He must have a fantasy of some sort, for some reason.

Maron drew the attention of the party.

“Well then. Let's get in!” He shouted.

They had rested long enough, and it was time to take action.

“Let's put our Tanker, Mentosa on the frontline. Yeo'meong, assist him. Rumm and Minerva should guard the sides and watch for the flanks, and Mr. Haroon, guard the backline please. Let's put our magicians in the middle, and each should assist each direction. Tess, take the frontside, Mir on the left, I'll take the right side, and Dasom will be assisting the backline. Lace will be our commander.”

It was just a summary of what they planned along the way, so there was no objections to it. The party had an archeress, an assassin, a priest, swordsmen and magicians, which is very well balanced. Haroon was a bit off, but he was just a member to fill the number, and since the commander, Lace was trusting his ability despite how low his level was, there was no reason for the others to say anything about him.

Footnotes:

¹Yeo'meong(여명) – The meaning is Daybreak.

² This is mistaken by the author, and is not from translation nor the edit. It is my guess that Tess was once designed as a swordswoman, later changed to a magician, and this is a residue of it, as the author compares Tess to a blade. I've checked their recent version, and oddly enough, it wasn't edited yet. Do your work, ROK media!

³ Mir(미르) – a pure korean word that means 'Dragon'

⁴ Dasom(다솜) – a pure korean word that means 'Love'

⁵ Nuna(누나) – The way younger males address slightly older females. (ex. Channy Nuna) Usually used in close relationship, but it doesn't matter for the kids how close the relationship is. In Haroon's case, it's likely that he would use title 님 which is pronounced as 'nim'. 님 is formal version of Mr., Miss, Ms., or Mrs. I haven't been/won't translate these kinds of titles unless it is needed.

⁶ Reminder: Korean culture is heavily based on age difference, and people with the same age tends to get along well, as they don't really need to be so formal to each other. Koreans have a different age system by the way. It is easy to understand if you think of it as '*n*th year'. When you are born, it is your first year of your life, so you are age 1. Age 19 means it is their 19th year of life.

Though, even when they are the same age, it is a good manner to ask if they can speak 'informally', unless there is some kind of context (Like being in the same class in school).

Chapter 10

Playing in a party with users

The KO-1 Top party excitedly entered the dungeon.

[You have found an unregistered dungeon! Each and every member has gained 50 fame as a reward of pioneering the discovery. Only a small party can enter this dungeon. If you register this dungeon, each and every member will gain an additional 30 fame. Would you like to register the dungeon?]

“Nope.”

The party could hear Maron refusing to register the dungeon.

[This dungeon has a difficulty of C, and is the habitat of Cave Goblins. The rulers of the cave are Hobgoblins and Goblin mages. The objective is to slay every boss monster in the dungeon. If you are the first party to clear this dungeon, every member will gain 50 fame and 30 S.P. May luck be with you, KO-1 Top]

They liked the reward of clearing the dungeon. Although there was no merit of gaining fame, 30 S.P. was the minimum requirement to learn a new skill. Moreover, they would surely gain some levels while exploring the dungeon.

But it was questionable whether cave goblins are similar to normal goblins, which people roughly estimated to be the equivalent to level 8~12. It wouldn't matter if they could fight with them one by one, but now they were forced to fight multiple enemies in an enclosed area, and no one seemed to have any experience with that.

Moreover, since they had no intel on the strength of the boss monsters, they got nervous.

“It won't be easy, but how hard could it be?”

“Don't jinx it. None of us have fought a boss monster yet.”

At Rumm's baseless, overconfident words, the cautious Tess provoked everyone's attention.

"We may not know the details of the Boss monsters, but we have Lace who has lots of experience in party play, so it'll be alright. If we try our best, it should be enough to clear the dungeon." Maron gave some words of inspiration.

"Yeah. We can do this!"

"Go, Go! Let's go! EXP awaits us!"

A pontiff can heal and sustain the party's health, so Lace was the most important person in the party. Also, since Lace was an experienced player, they were able to rely on her and trust her ability. Brimming with fighting spirit, they entered the cave.

The inner part of the cave was quite large compared to how it looked from the outside. The party made their way through stalactites and stone pillars that connected the ceiling and the ground, with Mentosa leading the way.

'It'd be better if the assassin, Dasom takes the lead...' Haroon thought to himself.

According to what he learned in the mercenary academy, the party needed to send a member as a scout when they were exploring a new place. In that way, the party would be able to prepare for what they would have to face.

This party was too well acquainted with normal game patterns. But Haroon didn't dare to give his opinion. His concern was realized soon, when they were passing a stalactite that was forming a stone pillar.

"It's poison darts!"

Mentosa suddenly cried, and at the same time, he and Minerva stumbled, falling down on the ground. With a quick reaction, Yeo'meong drew his sword and quickly wielded it. Several poison darts fell to the ground. They were illuminating with gloomy azure light, which was the unique property of goblin poisons.

"Barrier!"

"Barrier!"

The magicians casted the *Barrier* skill that they'd chanted prior. A giant barrier covered the entire party, and it earned them enough time to find out where the goblins were hiding. They were hiding behind the pillars and covers next to the wall of the cave.

"We gotta lure them out or snipe them."

But their archeress Minerva was down, ambushed by the goblins after relying too much on Mentosa. It was a dangerous situation where everyone could have been assassinated by the poison darts, but Lace's command was quick and bold.

"Tess, deactivate your barrier and cast AoE¹ combat magic."

"Workin' on it, sis." Tess replied

As the layer of barrier disappeared from the top, the sound of poison darts hitting the barrier could be heard louder than before.

"Fire wall!"

At the same moment, a wall made out of flame arose from the ground. Thin darts couldn't penetrate the wall, and even if some of them did, the poison was already burnt and wasn't effective enough to damage people.

"Dasom, flank them!"

Assassin Dasom took a few steps, and vanished into thin air. She used 'invisibility cloak'. The party could hear small noises from a side of the cave, which meant Dasom was moving near the cave wall to move around the wall of flame.

A few loathsome screams of Goblins echoed in the cave, and at the same time, Tess's wall of flame slowly collapsed. Rumm and Yeo'meong charged through the flames, which were weak enough to go through. The scene that came into their eyes were of about 40~50 goblin warriors with shoddy spears surrounding Dasom. She couldn't find a chance to return to stealth, and was barely surviving in the rain of spears.

"YOU BASTARDS!" Rumm shouted.

Rumm, enraged, swung his greatsword at the goblin that was blocking his way. Yeo'meong followed with his sharpened saber. Goblins died in vain. But some attacked back, and it slowed down the attacks of the two. The goblins' long spears were limiting their movement.

"What should we do now? They are more intelligent than we assumed. They know how to fight as a group!"

Lace stamped her feet out of frustration. Dasom was hit several times, and was barely surviving. The two swordsmen were too busy parrying the goblin attacks, it seemed impossible to press the attack.

The magicians couldn't dare to make any moves as the combat was way too chaotic. Lace who needed to command orders had to detox Minerva as well, but she didn't even have time to use any holy magic.

A sharp noise of something cutting the air was heard in everyone's ears.

Haroon was out of the barrier, throwing something. Then they could see the throwing knives he was holding between his fingers. The goblins screamed. A few goblins that were putting Dasom in danger fell to the ground, losing their breath.

A few knives cut the air once again. Like an illusion, they curved their way through the air and stabbed the nape of the necks of the goblins that were attacking Dasom with spears. They could hear the sound of spears being dropped on the floor, and the goblins that were hit were holding their necks, falling on the ground. Dasom, bleeding, hastened her way to Rumm and Yeo'meong. Seeing that, the swordsmen tried their best to open a way for Dasom. Dasom was able to make her way to the swordsmen, and it came as a great relief.

They were now out of the worst case scenario, but not danger. The number of goblins that were surrounding the three were still many. Moreover, there were still more goblins who were shooting darts, hiding behind pillars and walls, looking for their chances. Thanks to that, the Magicians were busy casting barriers alternatively, not having enough of a window to help the three.

"I'll cover the retreat, so heal Minerva!"

At Haroon's shout, Lace started healing Minerva. Her lips were already dyed purple,

and her body was as cold as ice. If Lace hesitated for a second, Minerva would die from poisoning.

“Purification!”

She cast purification magic. She still had to cast detoxifying magic as it wasn't enough.

“Anti-poison!”

A few arcs of light sprouted from her hands, and covered Minerva's body, and some entered through the skin. Lace gathered her hands and closed her eyes. Some holy energy flew out from her body. It was proof that she's reached a high-level of holiness.

Haroon was out of throwing knives. Numerous goblins were lying on the ground, and most of them were goblins that were using poison darts. As Haroon had experienced several battles, it was impossible for the Goblins to avoid Haroon's throwing knives.

Haroon took out all of his six-bladed shurikens from his inventory. He didn't expect them to be as impactful as throwing knives, since he didn't have enough experience with them. But it wasn't something that he could be picky about, as Dasom and the two swordsmen's conditions seemed fatal.

“Rumm, I'll cover you with throwing weapons, so slowly retreat and join the party!”

“OK. Then hurry up!”

Haroon smiled, to signal Rumm to trust him, and started to throw shurikens in series. The throwing speed was so fast that the party could not track the shurikens with their eyes. In the blink of an eye, the goblins that were surrounding the three fell down on the ground. The number of goblins that just fell was, amazingly, seven. All of them had been stabbed by shurikens in their vital points.

It opened a way for them. Rumm and Yeo'meong helped Dasom by holding her arms, and hurried their way back to the party. The goblins tried to stop them by throwing their spears, but there weren't enough of them to hinder Haroon from preventing them from taking action.

“Magicians, use your combat magic! Quickly!”

No one, including Haroon himself, realized that he was now the one commanding. But at his order, the magicians started casting spells, although they were exhausted from casting barriers to block the poison darts.

Now that there was no barrier to protect the party from the poison darts, they needed to take care of the goblins that shot them.

Haroon took out the throwing knives that he saved for this moment. He had no more time to waste. He let the party take care of the roughly 20 goblins that were charging at them, and summoned Brat.

“Summon! Guided knife!”

With insane speed, Haroon threw all of the 10 knives that he saved for this moment. With Brat’s power, they were shot at different targets. As Haroon took out most of the goblins that used poison darts, the tides of battle changed in the blink of an eye. Haroon quickly took an antidote, and withdrew more shurikens.

“Wall of Flame!”

“Wind Blades!”

“Firebolt!”

It seemed that they used every last bit of their mana, seeing as how their voices broke. But they were able to successfully cast their magic. The goblins that were charging at the party couldn’t avoid diving into a wall of flames because of their momentum. The goblins panicked, and the blades of wind mercilessly cut through their skin, followed by 6 bolts of fire that mainly targeted goblin warriors.

The heat of the battle got way higher, quite literally. Although it wasn’t intended, the combination of magics in the fire and wind divisions caused circulation of air in a confined space, gradually increasing the temperature. It wasn’t too bad for humans, but it felt like hell for goblins as they’re creatures covered in fur.

As the spells deactivated due to their duration time, the horrible scene of the battle came into their eyes. Only 5 or 6 goblins survived, which were slowly walking backwards with fear in their eyes. The rest were lying down on the ground, or were still being burned alive, rolling around to put out the fire.

The smell of burning meat, fur, the scent of blood and the screams of goblins. Seeing this hell-like scene, some even swore as if they couldn't stand what they were seeing. It was even more horrifying, as it wasn't an open space like a hunting ground, but a confined space with less light.

Something cut the air, and that woke up the paralyzed thoughts of the party. It was a sound of Haroon throwing his shuriken. Another goblin that was screaming, rolling around, suddenly stopped moving.

"We gotta finish their pain, Rumm."

"R-right. We should."

With pale faces, Rumm and Yeo'meong slowly walked toward the goblins, and stabbed their swords into the goblins' necks. Haroon did the same thing, but mainly collecting throwing knives, daggers and shurikens. Their durabilities had dropped quite a bit, and their blades were dulled as he had used them several times.

It was at that moment, when he heard the UI sound.

[You have leveled up by 3!]

It meant that the battle had finally finished. Though it may be low-level goblins, Haroon had about 20 solo kills on them and it increased Haroon's level by 3. And that wasn't all he got.

[Focus is increased by 1 point]

[Agility is increased by 1 point]

[E.S.P. is increased by 1 point]

[You have gained 30 S.P.]

If it wasn't for the UI sound that alerted him of his gains, his day could have been ruined, knowing that the horrible scene would be the only thing he would get from the fight. The party needed to get out of this scene as soon as possible to lighten the mood.

He turned towards the party to suggest moving, but then he realized it would be better if he didn't disturb them. It seemed like everyone else was hearing what their UI sound

brought. After a moment, unhideable joy became apparent in their eyes.

“I’ve leveled up! Two levels at the same time!”

“Same! I can’t believe what just happened. Think of how hard it was to level up!”

“Haha! Those goblins must have been of a higher level than we thought.”

“Nah, see what we just did. You can easily tell that we’ve just slain 60 or even 70 enemies in one fight. It’d be strange if we didn’t level up.”

“That was intense though. I’ve never felt this horrible before.”

As the mood lightened up due to the joy of getting their spoils of victory, looking back at the after-battle scene wasn’t as horrible as before.

“Maron, let’s leave this place for now. We have some people injured and it can’t be good for them.”

Saying that, Lace stood up. With help from Lace’s healing magic, Minerva’s face was returning to normal.

“Good call. Rumm, Yeo’meong, help Dasom. I’ll carry Minerva on my back.”

At Maron’s order, the party moved with haste. Meanwhile, Haroon wiped the blood from his throwing weapons and stacked them on his belt or stashed them in his bag. While he had time to do so, he took some blowpipes, darts and bottles of poisons. He was taking them, thinking that they’ll be of some help later on.

“Haroon.”

It was Lace. Her face flushed with excitement after seeing someone heroically save the party.

“Thank you for helping us. To be honest, I underestimated you and I’m really sorry about that. If it wasn’t for you, we would have been...”

Lace shivered with fright.

“I’m just a party member, so you don’t need to say those kinds of words. I should help if I can.”

“That makes me even more embarrassed. I honestly thought it was just like us doing everything for you. Leveling you up, possibly sharing an item with you. I thought you were the one who got lucky, but it was us who were fortunate to have you. If Rumm didn’t stop you...”

“Nah. I’m just glad that I could be of help. I don’t think this is a place for that matter though. We can always talk about it after clearing the dungeon.”

“You are right about that. Let’s move for now.”

Before they knew, the party drew nearer and was listening to their conversation. Same to Lace’s thoughts, they seemed sorry for what they thought about him. Rumm was smiling brightly though.

“I’ll scout ahead.”

Haroon volunteered.

“You know that kind of thing should be ordered by the party lea-”

Haroon was already moving when Maron spoke. Irritated, Maron frowned. But the others were nodding. They didn’t feel any need of a scout, but soon realized they had the wrong idea.

It was totally different from how tankers lead the party. At every corner, Haroon climbed walls or looked for a blind spot to scout ahead without making any sound. Sneaking around, he proceeded only when it was safe to move. That caused the entire party to approach more carefully, successfully finding the traces of goblin ambushes three times.

Preparing to face the ambushes became a great advantage for the party. The goblins couldn’t make bold moves like the first time, and dealing with 5 to 10 of them at a time wasn’t a hard task.

“We should have moved like this in the first place...”

It was what Tess said after defeating the third ambush.

“If we did so, Minerva and Dasom wouldn’t have got hurt.”

Yeo’meong casually replied to Tess. Maron heard it, and his face turned grim and serious. He was the party leader, after all, and Yeo’meong’s words would have acted as great criticism to his orders. Moreover, Haroon’s heroic save weakened Maron’s power in the party, which made him anxious and enraged. His look on Haroon started to get colder and colder.

“Nah, it is not our fault. I just wanted to say Haroon is an amazing player. If we came here on our own, we would have died to the first ambush.”

Tess couldn’t stop complimenting Haroon’s performance.

“I thought the same thing. His level is only 17, and it is just a number for him. His ability isn’t limited to his level. Haroon must be a guy who experiences Beyond more than anyone else. Perhaps he died so many times, that he dropped from a high level to lower than us. I didn’t expect him to be an ordinary user listening to your sister’s words since she is so good at dealing with people, but I’d never have guessed he’d be this good,” said Minerva.

Everyone nodded. Except Maron. Tess seemed happy that Minerva was complimenting Lace.

“Well, she told me she’s been observing that user on the way here, and she said he seem to have stats of all classes, adding that he has so much more experience than us. So I guess you’re right.”

Listening to Minerva and Tess’s whisper-like conversation, the party looked at Haroon with somewhat respectful eyes. He might be the lowest level of the party, but his ability was the highest, and they couldn’t see his limit.

Seeing Haroon smoothly slipping around the walls without making any sound, Assassin Dasom couldn’t close her mouth. Not to mention the ability to throw weapons silently. Those concealing, nimble moves were something she’s been striving for, and a non-assassin, low level user was already executing it.

Moreover, the quick wits, sense of occasion and appropriate commands he showed on

emergent situations, was something that couldn't be executed by ordinary players. His true identity was suspicious, but since Lace told the party that he's trustable, that wasn't something she needed to be concerned about.

"But haven't we been in the cave for quite a long time? When are we fighting the boss?" Said Tess, in a joking manner.

Haroon suddenly stopped. Haroon sent a signal to halt, and the whole party went silent.

There was a wall in front of them. It was an intersection that lead to two different ways.

With a small noise, Haroon's body was shot to the ceiling that was about 4 meters high. Like a bat, he grabbed stalactites and crawled over it to the right path. The party could barely hide their astonishment. It didn't take long for him to come back. With another small noise, Haroon landed on the ground, and signaled to retreat for a bit, but silently.

"So Haroon, what was that about?"

Rumm asked with great expectations shown on his face.

"That was the boss room."

"The boss? Really?"

Rumm rejoiced. They were finally facing the boss they longed for. They couldn't be more excited as they were just one step away from getting some items.

"There are two magicians, about 30 warriors, and a Hobgoblin with a crown on its head. They are still eating their meal, though."

The party could feel the tension rising in the atmosphere.

"So what should we do, Haroon?" Tess asked.

"ME? Why would you ask me that?" Haroon replied, confused.

Haroon couldn't understand why Tess would ask him when the party had a leader. He

was just scouting, after all. Then Haroon could see Maron's arrogant face had a cold, set expression.

"Yeah, tell us your opinion on this," Lace added.

"Huh? Lace, you too?"

Lace's face was full of trust while looking at Haroon.

"Of course, that's 'cause you're the most experienced player of us all. Isn't that obvious? Maron was leading us only because we didn't know your true skills. Things are different now."

"She is right. It's not about who has the right to command. We sincerely need guidance from an experienced player."

Dasom and Yeo'meong joined them as well. After seeing how he made whole party level up by 2, they had to admit that Haroon's ability easily surpassed their own.

At last, Haroon realized the party wanted him to lead them. Of course, excluding one of them. He couldn't understand why, but that wasn't important. The first thing they needed to do was to clear the dungeon.

"Alright, then we should take care of the magicians first, since we don't know what kind of magic they can cast. I'll mark one, and Minerva, you'll be marking the other one. Lace, standby and prepare just in case one of us fails to kill the magicians. Magicians, you'll need to cast the most effective magics you've ever learned, at the same time. You could use fire and wind magics like the last time, but since I'm not an expert on that, I'll leave that up to you. Try to come up with the combination that would be most effective in a enclosed area like this."

The people who got called nodded without answering.

"Dasom, when things get chaotic from the magic attacks, move around to the back side and flank them. There should be a good chance for you. Swordsmen, when most of the goblin warriors are taken care of after the two combined magic attacks, you'll be charging at the Hobgoblin in a straight line."

The swordsmen grabbed their weapons firmly.

“Magicians, after casting magic, retreat into different directions, then look for a place to regain mana so you can attack the Hobgoblin, assisting the swordsmen. I, too, will join the fight after taking care of the rest of the goblin warriors with throwing weapons.

It was an impeccable plan. As the brief was told, Haroon started explaining the plan in details, drawing a small map on the ground, and marking where each member should be positioned.

He picked up these kinds of strategies in the Mercenary camp, but the others were believing that Haroon had lots of experience with dungeons. Otherwise, it would be impossible for someone to come up with such an advanced strategy in such a short time.

Seeing how the others looked at Haroon, he knew they were misunderstanding something, but he didn't bother to explain it in detail. There was no time and no reason to. Perhaps, the plan would work better if they believed that Haroon has great experience in sketching plans. If the members cannot trust the leader, they would not be able to execute the plan.

“Then, Lace, We need your blessings.”

Upon his words, Lace started chanting the incantation with a language they couldn't understand. *Holy words*, presumably.

“*Bless!*”

[You are now blessed. Every ability is enhanced by 10% for 5 minutes]

The members dropped their jaws, seeing a single spell boosting their abilities by 10%. But there was no time to waste. With Haroon leading in the front, the party tried their best not to make any sounds when moving to the boss room, passing the corner, taking the right path. Soon, they entered a room that was as large as the place where they first got ambushed.

The goblins were eating something piled up in the center, which looked like fresh corpses of bats. The Hobgoblin, which had a smaller body than the goblin warriors, and the goblin magicians which seemed quite old were sitting at the innermost area.

As befits its name, elite monsters, the hobgoblin and goblin magicians were having their meal at leisure with their portion separated. Meanwhile, the goblin warriors were eating as fast as they could to eat at least one more than the others.

Haroon and Minerva got in position near the entrance of the room. Minerva slowly pulled out an arrow and loaded it, staring at the goblin magician on the left. Haroon took a knife out and threw it, giving a signal to Minerva at the same time. There was no need to summon Brat for this round.

Two objects were shot. Two screams were heard. One was short, and one was still ongoing. Minerva's arrow hit the magician's shoulder, which wasn't enough to kill it. It was fortunate at least that Haroon's knife hit the head as it killed the goblin instantly.

"The magicians!"

As soon as Haroon and Minerva quickly retreated, the magicians finished chanting their magic. The spells activated as they spoke their incantations.

"Wall of Flame!"

"Wind Blowing!"

"Wind Blowing!"

It was super effective! It took quite a while for the magicians to come up with this combination, one person setting a wall of flame and the others blowing wind on it spread fire in a large area. This combination of 1 and 2 circle magics were having a similar effect of 'Fire Wave', which is a 3 circle magic, or maybe even to 'Fire Field', which was 4 circle magic.

As a sudden fire interrupted the happy meal time of the goblins, the goblin warriors panicked and fell back, but half of them were already swept by the flames.

"Wall of Flame!"

"Wind Blowing!"

"Wind Blowing!"

The first wall of flame was yet to be extinguished, and still the second wave swept the goblins. At this time, the fire wall was cast much further from the party, effectively driving the goblins further back.

At that moment, Haroon sent a signal to Minerva, thinking it'd be effective if they attacked the goblins at a distance. Although it wasn't discussed during the planning phase, Minerva understood and answered with a smile. To not miss the chance, Minerva quickly shot arrows.

Haroon threw his shurikens through the wall of flame. Without having visible reference to aim at, it was more practical to attack by numbers. Saving his throwing knives and daggers for the Hobgoblin, he consecutively threw shurikens at a fast rate.

The goblins' fearful screams leaked through the flames. The flames were already burning their furs from a distance, and they were getting attacked by shurikens and arrows. Attacks from unknown sources made them even more scared.

At last, the magic was reaching its duration time. They could see the flames getting smaller and smaller.

"The swordsmen!"

The swordsmen jumped into the flames that were too weak to hurt them. In front of them, there were goblins shivering from fear, not being able to hold their spears properly. The swordsmen took different directions, cutting hearts and vital points of easy targets. When the flames were entirely extinguished, not even 10 goblins were left.

"Haha, they are just like rats in a trap!" Mentosa cried happily.

Laughing broadly, he lifted his greatsword high up in the air. Yeo'meong and Rumm too, wielded their swords covered in green blood, trying to make a fancy finale.

"Step back!"

The sudden, sharp cry of Tess filled the cave. They saw the Hobgoblin opening its mouth wide from behind the wall of goblins, but it was too late. In the blink of an eye, the Hobgoblin sprayed poisonous liquid, and it turned into a poison cloud in a cone shape.

“Kugh!”

“Ugh! It’s poison!”

Mentosa couldn’t avoid it, and careless Rumm was in the area of effect as well. Covering their eyes with their hands, they fell on the ground. Yeo’meong quickly made a roll to the side, covering his face with his arm, but it still got him.

“Minerva, shoot them! Magicians, cast fire magic!”

As soon as Haroon shouted, Minerva instinctively loaded arrows and shot them, but the magicians couldn’t cast their magic because of the swordsmen rolling on the ground. While the magicians were hesitating to take action, the poison was still getting closer to the rest of the party.

“Quickly!”

Haroon pressed them, but instinctive fear overwhelmed their rationality. The magicians slowly fell back.

Frustrated, Haroon summoned Brat.

“Summon!”

As soon as Brat was summoned, Lace quickly cast holy magic.

“Anti Poison!”

Seeing the string of light spreading as if it was going to cover the poison cloud, the party was able to feel relieved. But it only lasted for a moment. The poison cloud overwhelmed the light and started spreading further.

“No way! The poison is way too strong!”

Lace kept her hands together and remained in praying posture, but the light wasn’t able to get out of the poison cloud.

“Brat, absorb it, quickly!”

“Yaya~ hehehe, now this, is what I call poison.”

Making sinister laughs, Brat started absorbing the poison cloud.

“Minerva!” Haroon shouted once again.

Then she finally realized she wasn’t shooting, paralyzed by the sudden changes. Knowing that gazing isn’t her job, she drew arrows and shot through the poison cloud that was now too thick to see through. They could hear the arrows dropping on the ground, which meant the Hobgoblin had already moved. Minerva bit her lower lip, then started shooting randomly. It made the poison cloud spread slower, as if the hobgoblin was threatened by Minerva’s arrows.

Brat started to move in earnest, and his absorbing ability was way stronger than what Haroon initially thought. As the Hobgoblin stopped producing the poison cloud to avoid arrow attacks, the poison cloud was getting smaller and smaller. They were now able to see the swordsmen again, who were lying on the ground, poisoned.

Haroon swallowed the antidote he was holding in his mouth, and unsummoned Brat. He had to move before it became too late. Kicking the ground, Haroon ran to where the swordsmen had fallen.

“Catch!”

Haroon THREW Mentosa, Rumm, and Yeo’meong at the party. There was no time for him to carry them.

“Woah!”

“Aaah!”

Nobody could catch them, but at least, the three swordsmen fell on them. They wouldn’t have gotten injured as much as if they fell on the ground.

Haroon gathered all his attention and looked at the poisonous cloud that was spreading once again. He slowly took some shurikens out, and threw them when the cloud was about to encroach on his arms.

A short scream came from the goblins that were hiding behind the cloud. He could tell where the goblins were, as they were shivering with fright. Though, he couldn't really tell where the Hobgoblin was.

A threatening shout came from the Hobgoblin, and echoed in the cave.

[You have been feared by the Hobgoblin.
Your ability is weakened by 10% for 2 minutes]

The players' movements were slowed. But Haroon wasn't affected that much. He wasn't tired yet, and the fear was only countering Lace's blessing for the moment. Instead, the Hobgoblin only revealed its location to Haroon. Haroon quickly threw three throwing knives, aiming to where the sound came from.

They could hear a disgusting scream, which was quite different from the common goblin. It was full of anger, pain, and hatred, which was presumably the Hobgoblin's.

[You are poisoned! You are receiving 30 damage per second]

This was definitely a strong poison. When Brat's poison was only dealing 10 damage per second, the Hobgoblin's venom was three times stronger. But Haroon got used to getting poisoned, so he calmly summoned Brat.

"Brat, absorb poison!"

"Hehehe! This is fun, Mas! Summon me as much as you can if it's in a place like this."

It excitedly went around, absorbing the poison cloud. Soon, the poison cloud slowly vanished, and they could see about 5 goblins crumpled together in one spot. Because of the sudden changes of the situation, no one had noticed that Haroon was summoning and ordering Brat. Unsummoning Brat, Haroon threw shurikens once again. He couldn't miss such a large target.

The goblins that were surrounding the Hobgoblin had fallen. In the middle of them, the Hobgoblin was slowly dying, with a knife embedded in its head. It must be the one that Haroon threw before Brat absorbed the last poison cloud. It seemed that the Hobgoblin was spreading poison, so it couldn't avoid the knife when Haroon threw it.

[You have cleared the dungeon!]

Each and every member of your party will gain 30 S.P. and 50 fame.]

A joyful sound was heard from Lace, who was still casting *anti-poison* magic, the magicians, and the others. It made them feel proud, and eased the tension. Haroon had an additional UI sound playing in the background.

[You have leveled up by 2!]

[You have received an item!]

[Focus is increased by 1 point]

[ESP is increased by 1 point]

[You have slain the Hobgoblin single-handedly.

You are rewarded with the title 'Hobgoblin Slayer', additional 20 S.P. and fame.

As a reward of getting a title, every stat is increased by 1 point.]

They were exciting rewards. Though he was playing as a party, the result was mostly Haroon's work, and they were rewards that he deserved.

Checking his H.P. dropping by every second, he quickly took an antidote. He needed some rest. He was suffering from a headache after focusing for such a long period of time.

The party members were gathering where the Hobgoblin had fallen, anticipating some good items. Since Haroon had gotten an item already, he gave up on joining them, and leaned up against the wall on the side to rest, closing his eyes.

"Wooaah!"

Tess cried with joy.

"Four items?!"

"Haha, that's a jackpot! Four items from a goblin dungeon?"

They were busy checking the items dropped near the Hobgoblin's corpse. As if they forgot Haroon's existence, who achieved the current outcome, their eyes were burning bright from seeing the info and stats of the items.

"This is mine!"

“Nonsense! This is a skill book of the fire division, so I should be the one who’s taking it.”

Haroon opened his eyes, hearing Tess and Mir arguing for a skill book.

Between the ladies, Maron was holding the skill book, looking left and right. His hand was shaking with greed.

“Ladies, calm down. You should listen to what the party leader says.”

Maron’s words caused embarrassment for the two, but they didn’t give up.

“Hey, listen to yourself. If I were you, I wouldn’t speak like that because I’d be ashamed by the fact that I have been useless in this dungeon.”

“She is right. Weren’t you the one who’s been taking the best item every time?”

Tess, even Mir was taking a strong stand against him.

Next to them, Rumm, Yeo’meong and Mentosa were drooling over a steel sword.

“Can I take this steel sword?”

“Well, I think I’ll need it too.”

“Its a high-uncommon item. It’s too great to give up, unfortunately.”

The three swordsmen were hoping for the others to give up the item.

It seemed like some items had already found their owner. Lace was holding a skill book with two hands, with exhaustion reflected on her face. Presumably a skill book of the holy magic division. No one needed to compete with her then.

The other one was a small bow, held by Minerva. She was looking into thin air, smiling. Probably checking the stats of it. As she was the only archeress in the party, it was easy for her to get the item, just like Lace.

Assassin Dasom was inspecting the Hobgoblin’s corpse. She must be interested in its

poison, since some of the Assassin's skills must be related to poison.

'Ha, one man sows and another man reaps, huh.'

Haroon sighed from looking at them. He had no interest in items as he'd already got one by solo-killing the boss. It was pathetic to see their unscrupulous behaviour. They were fighting over items that they shouldn't have got, nor even survived for, if it wasn't for him.

"Oh, Haroon!"

Seeing Haroon getting up, Lace turned her gaze from the item to Haroon.

"If it wasn't for you, it would have been a disaster. Thanks."

"Yeah. It's good to see everyone's all right."

Haroon answered it casually. Haroon was upset about the situation. Haroon was pretty sure the others heard Lace, but they were not tearing their eyes off of the items.

"Well, since we've cleared the dungeon, I'll go now."

"What do you mean? Since you've carried us you shou-"

Finally, she realized what was going on, and couldn't finish her sentence. Her face went red out of embarrassment, seeing herself holding an item, and her sister Tess, arguing over another one.

Haroon opened the party window.

[Party member Haroon has quit the Ko-1 Top Party.]

Seeing the message, Maron dismissed it right away. But for some reason, he came to talk with Haroon, putting the skill book in his bag, and completely ignoring Mir and Tess.

With an arrogant face and slow steps, Maron was emphasizing that he was a noble.

"You've done a lot for us."

“Don’t mention it.”

It was easy to tell that Maron didn’t mean it at all, and wasn’t appreciating Haroon. Haroon dismissed it shortly. Not caring about Haroon’s attitude, Maron opened his mouth.

“Let me give you an offer. Why don’t you keep playing with us?”

“Hmm?”

As if he thought Haroon was considering it positively, he continued.

“I could help you a lot in the real world if it’s you. You know, I might have more things in my hand than you could imagine. If you follow me, I can provide you with a good job, a good house, and full support for your whole life.”

Haroon was shocked at his, so-called, ‘offer’. He was saying it fully intending to get Haroon as his man, under his family. It was even more appalling that Haroon could easily tell from Maron’s face that he was thinking he’d won Haroon already.

‘Hah, should I just beat the shit out of this guy?’ He thought to himself.

He knew his old self would have accepted the offer submissively, but he was different now. He could feel it himself, as he knew his old self would have never thought of such a thing at all. It was also tempting to offend him.

“Fuhaha! Isn’t that surprising to see there is a man who dares to get me as his fam? I only followed this party because I met a friend who was very likeable, and I thought it’d be fun.”

The party was astonished by Haroon’s furious laugh and words.

“W-What in the.....”

Maron started stuttering.

“Do I look that easy to you?”

Haroon stopped laughing. His face had turned into a cold, grim face, staring at Maron with sharp eyes. Some kind of aura was forming from his eyes, to his entire body, and to his surroundings. Like boss monsters, his mana was bursting into the air, which was very hard to resist.

“Ug-Ugh.”

Maron’s face went pale, and he started to step back without even realizing it. Some kind of warlike atmosphere overwhelmed and pressured him. The other’s faces were going pale as well. Seeing how the others were reacting, Haroon calmed down his wrath.

Haroon was surprised to see himself not only being able to fully express his feelings, but he was able to express it through mana. Though he understood it by accident, he was quite proud to think of it. It was possible because he accumulated some mana, and some basic frame for using it.

“I’ll pretend that I heard nothing of such an arrogant *offer* for now, since we were in the same party once. I hope you’ll never meet me again. I’m the kind of person who does keep things in mind, so it wouldn’t be good for you.”

Maron, still pale, couldn’t say anything at all. It was the same for the others. Haroon decided to give up on this party. There was nothing to resent, as he’s got an item already. Haroon had experienced these kinds of people in the real world. But he decided not to forgive Maron, resolving that he’ll beat the shit out of him if he meets him in real life.

“Haroon, you can’t go like this.”

At least Lace tried to stop him.

“We’ll meet again if fate allows. It was nice to meet you. Then I’ll get going.”

Haroon gave a single nod, then left the place.

“G-guys! Why are you just standing around? Haroon’s leaving!”

Rumm was the only one who reacted to Lace’s words. Seeing Haroon leaving the dungeon without any hesitation, he gave up arguing for the sword and followed him

out. The others were still stunned by the situation.

“You, YOU won’t get away with this! How, How DARE you!”

Haroon could hear Maron howling, but his voice was shaking so badly that it didn’t scare him at all.

‘I won’t get away with this? Let’s see who won’t!’

Haroon would never be forgetting it.

“Haroon, Wait!”

Rumm could see that Haroon was still angry, and lowered his head in embarrassment. With a grave face, Haroon patted Rumm’s shoulder a few times, and headed to the exit of the cave.

“Where are you heading? Where can I meet you again?”

At Rumm’s word, Haroon stopped, turned around and stared directly at him. Haroon smiled at his face that was once again innocent, though he was formerly shaken by greed.

“I’m heading to Count Joren Castle. I’ll be there for a while.”

“I’ll get to you. I’ll return the favor if I get to see you. Thank you for saving me.”

“Dude, what are friends for?”

Rumm made a true, innocent smile. Haroon felt much better after seeing that.

‘At least he is a good guy.’

He finally met someone whom he could consider as a friend. He wanted to get to know him more , but he was going to wait for another time. It was because he saw Lace coming out too.

‘We are bound to meet if fate allows us.’

Thinking he'll be a good friend, Haroon continued.

"Take care. I'm running a small mercenary guild named The Gusts of Wind, so you'll be able to meet me if you look for it. Let's have a drink next time."

"I knew you weren't an ordinary player, but you were already the leader of a guild? Accept me to your guild! It sounds fun."

"You're always welcome. The Gusts of Wind pursue elitism, so I'll train you well once you get in."

"Thanks! I'll make sure to get to you. Wait, no, make it 'we', as I'll bring some of my friends as well."

When Haroon nodded, Lace arrived, catching her breath. She didn't know where to put herself in embarrassment.

"Haroon, would you forgive us? They are still young, and it was the first time they got any items from a dungeon. They are flipped over the new achievement, but they'll see what they did wrong. And don't mind Maron. You know nobles are like that."

Lace was still holding the skill book, hesitating to put it into her inventory. She was ashamed of seeing herself valuing the item she got over Haroon, and was sorry about the fact that Haroon got nothing for what he achieved.

"If you are okay with this..."

At last, she handed the skill book she was holding to Haroon.

"Lace, I might be inexperienced with relationships, but I know what I know. People reveal their true nature when the chips are down. But I think I'd love to meet you again. Then, 'till we meet again, GLHF²."

Picking those as his last words, he quit the dungeon. Because of the sunlight outside, to Rumm and Lace it seemed like Haroon's silhouette was entering the blazing light.

Lace sighed deeply, looking back to the deeper parts of the cave, where her younger sister and her sister's friends would still be arguing over the items.

“We missed a really good man,” she added. ‘And I’m ending the relationship with Tess’s friends. Just like what he said, it’s disgusting to see their true nature.’

She looked back and forth several times, then she followed Rumm out of the cave with determination.



Out of the thornbush forest, Haroon made his way out onto the main road. He hesitated for a moment, then he headed towards the castle. He didn’t feel like hunting anymore.

‘I’d rather stay with the NPCs. Of course, not everyone would be like that, but that felt quite bitter. I’m heading back to the guest house.’

Soon after he headed back to the castle, Rumm came out of the thornbush forest breathlessly, but Haroon was already gone. He sat down heavily and sighed deeply.

“Rumm, don’t be so disappointed.”

He heard Lace, but he didn’t look back.

“I’m not going to see my friends in-game. Not anymore.”

His voice was as dry as fallen leaves, but it was full of determination.

“But you’ve been friends with them for years.”

Rumm’s bright personality was leading her sister’s friends by setting examples, so Lace tried to stop him, diffidently.

“I’m not just saying it. Even if you don’t count Maron as he is a noble, I’ve been thinking that my friends are selfish and cunning for a long time. I’m an artificial human, remember? I know I’m not a real friend to them. Some are being nice to me out of sympathy for not having biological parents, some are just taking advantage of my personality of liking people, some are just being friendly as we’ve known each other for a long time.”

Lace was speechless as his voice sounded too lonely. And she knew Rumm wasn’t

wrong.

“I was afraid of being considered as incompetent, and that was why I got along with them... But I don’t care anymore. My existence isn’t important to them anyways. I knew the truth was coming, and I didn’t want to admit it, but now it feels so much better as I’ve seen it.”

“But you know Dasom is different.”

Rumm’s eyes deepened when he heard the name, but eventually he shook his head.

“She is a better person than I deserve. If I’m with her, her social class will make her unhappy. It’d be so much better for her if I give up my feelings for her.”

Lace couldn’t find anything to say. She was surprised to see how depressed Rumm was, as she was quite close to Rumm since she started to hang out with the members of the party.

‘Maybe he is right...’

Dasom’s father was the minister of the Union Defence. Rumm was incompetent, but with the love and fortune of his parents, he was able to get into a university. With the grades he was achieving, it was not a distant future that he would slowly get further away from the central part of the Union.

Considering that, it was impossible for Rumm and Dasom to have a good future. There might be a tragedy waiting for them. Like what Rumm said, it might be better for him to give up on his affection for Dasom.

“At least you’re a good friend to me. I really appreciate it.”

“Rumm, it’s not good to jump to any conclusions.”

“No, I knew I was going in the wrong direction, and I simply needed to check. I met Haroon today, and he was more honest to me than the 7 friends I’ve had for years, so I’ll go and look for him. I realized that it’s not the numbers that is important when it comes to friends. I think it’d be much better if I only have one friend that I can rely on.”

Lace was feeling the same as what Rumm was saying. Though Haroon didn’t appear

as a friend, it was true that she was feeling something towards him.

‘As a man,’ she thought.

With blushes on her face, Lace asked.

“Have you heard where he is heading?”

“It’s a secret. I can’t tell if Dasom would find out through Tess, so I’ll keep it as a secret.”

Lace nodded. She didn’t even know herself whether she could manage to not tell if her sister asked stubbornly. And there was a way to find out if she wanted, so there was no reason to be obstinate.

“And as I know where he is heading, I’ll wait for him at his destination even if I cannot find him in Paros Castle. I think I’ll be enjoying this world much more if I go with him. Maybe in the hopeless real world as well...”

Rumm stood up, and made his first bold step towards the castle. His sagging shoulders rose, and his face brightened.

Seeing Rumm leaving, she sighed. With another long sigh, she sat down at the place she was standing.

Footnotes:

¹AOE – Area Of Effect

²GLHF – Good Luck, Have Fun.

Chapter 11

Prepared members

It was on the seventh day after the members of the Gusts of Wind, except Serinn, had entered the Halls of Warriors. The members came back to the guest house in the late afternoon. Although they seemed exhausted due to their hard training, it was good to see that their eyes were still burning bright.

“I really appreciate your consideration, Boss. I learned some good tricks, thanks to you,” said Teeno.

Haroon was concerned about Teenno being weak in combat, but now he was relieved that he’s learned a good combat skill.

“Hahaha! Boss! Now I can knock down every monster with a single shield!”

Haroon chuckled from the chatterbox’s words, but he didn’t rebuke him for it. It was good to see that he was being confident for once.

“Hoho, monsters are my bread from now on. I learned an awesome skill, you know?”

Haroon hoped so. He hoped she wouldn’t get the party in trouble by taunting the monsters.

“Boss, thanks.”

Haroon found Philip the most trustworthy, as he could easily tell that his eyes had deepened. Though it was pitiful to see Serinn’s sagging shoulders, there was nothing the party could do for her. All they could do was speak no more about it.

‘I wonder how much they’ve changed...’

Haroon was expecting a good result, as it was the first time he was opening the guild stat window after they had completed their first quest.

Name: The Gusts of Wind

Grade: Small guild – D

Specialization: N/A

Members: Philip, Gitan, Serinn, Ritrina, Teeno, Haroon(leader)

Fame: 100

Though they have completed two quests, there was no change made to the grade as they were personal quests, not through the mercenary office. Haroon touched on each member's status window.

Name: Philip

Race: Human NPC

Class: Swordsman

Level: 40

Title: Grade-D Mercenary

H.P.: 1,400 **M.P.:** 1,100

Strength: 44 **Stamina:** 48

Intellect: 25 **Wisdom:** 28

Luck: 5 **Agility:** 19

Focus: 6

[Skills]

Smashing Blow – Basic Lv.5(96.25%)/Lv.5

Multi-blow – Intermediate Lv.1(85.20%)/Lv.5

Philip has leveled up 5 times during the journey, and he has learned an intermediate skill in the Hall of Warriors. By name, Haroon presumed it to be an evolved skill of Smashing Blow.

Name: Gitan

Race: Human NPC

Class: Swordsman

Level: 32

Title: Grade E Mercenary

H.P.: 1,535 **M.P.:** 740

Strength: 61 **Stamina:** 60

Intellect: 5 **Wisdom:** 7

Luck: 5 **Agility:** 7

[Skills]

Shield Attack – Basic Lv.2(12%)/Lv.5

Shield Crossing – Basic Lv.1(88.50%)/Lv.5』

Gitan has leveled up 7 times. His stat gains were mainly on Strength and Stamina. Like Haroon thought, this character would be like a corpse without his strength. Though he might be a cowardly man, he learned two skills in the Hall of Warriors. He wondered how Gitan was able to learn two skills when Haroon only paid for one.

‘Well, scientists do say bears are clever when they look rather dull’

Name: Serinn

Race: Human NPC

Class: Swordswoman

Level: 23

Title: Grade-E mercenary

H.P.: 1,105 **M.P.:** 970

Strength: 26 **Stamina:** 34

Intellect: 18 **Wisdom:** 25

Luck: 7 **Agility:** 11

Coquetry: 6

[Skills]

Housework – Basic Lv.1(82.36%)/Lv.5

Skinning – Basic Lv.4(24.40%)/Lv.5

Since Serinn was not deployed for combat, she only leveled up twice. Though, because Haroon forced her to do every miscellaneous job, her strength and stamina rose quite a lot. Her skill Skinning was quite high as well.

Though, it was Haroon’s concern that she doesn’t have any combat ability. Coquetry didn’t rise at all as she didn’t have much chance to use it lately.

Name: Ritrina

Race: Human NPC

Class: Swordswoman

Level: 28

Title: Grade-E mercenary

H.P.: 1,070 **M.P.:** 830

Strength: 34 **Stamina:** 34

Intellect: 16 **Wisdom:** 18

Luck: 8 **Agility:** 26

[Skills]

Swift: Basic Lv.1(90.20%)/Lv.5

Taunt: Basic Lv.3(24.40%)/Lv.5』

Ritrina has leveled up 4 times. The name of the skill she learned in the Hall of Warriors suggest that it's an agile skill. It was interesting to see how she was able to level up her taunt skill 3 times in such a short time.

Name: Teeno

Race: Human NPC

Class: Swordsman

Level: 49

Title: Grade-C mercenary

H.P.: 1,500 **M.P.:** 1,350

Strength: 34 **Stamina:** 50

Intellect: 38 **Wisdom:** 40

Luck: 8 **Agility:** 36

Focus: 11 **E.S.P.:** 4

Observation: 12 **Foresight:** 10

[Skills]

Topography Recon – Intermediate Lv.4(82.00%)/Lv.5

First aid – Advanced Lv.1(96.50%).Lv.5

Collecting Herbs – Intermediate Lv.3(21.20%)/Lv.5

Compounding remedy – Intermediate Lv.2(40.13%)/Lv.5

Messenger Moving – Basic Lv.5(100%)/Lv.5

Cartographing – Intermediate Lv.3(64.54%)/Lv.5

Defence Sword – Basic Lv.1(90.20%)/Lv.5』

‘Oh my gosh!’

Teeno's abilities were beyond Haroon's expectation. His level was the highest in all the members in the guild, and he was even a grade-C mercenary. He had 4 additional stats, and various skills. Though he may lack some combat abilities, it was pure luck to have him in the guild.

‘I don’t think I should be the boss instead of him!’

Haroon thought in doubt. Anyways, he was relieved by having him in the guild, as his members were not exactly the best, if he didn’t count Philip.

‘I should check mine as well.’

Recalling that it was first time checking his status window after clearing the dungeon, Haroon opened his stat window.

Name: Haroon

Race: Human

Class: Swordsman

Level: 22

Title: Mercenary Guild Leader(and 5 others)

H.P.: 1,235 **M.P.:** 1,265

E.F.P.: 450

Strength: 46(+15) **Stamina:** 37

Intellect: 21 **Wisdom:** 39

Luck: 31 **Agility:** 34(+12)

Endurance: 16 **E.S.P.:** 12

Focus: 22 **S.P.:** 93

Fame: 1190 **Leadership:** 465

Fire Resistance: +10%

Magic Resistance: +10%

Bonus stats: 24

‘Dang, I’ve been power leveling!’

He leveled up 12 times within a few days after getting his class advancement, and this was a remarkable achievement as no one has done that before. Although 7 levels were the reward of a quest, it made him feel proud, as he had been thinking that he wasn’t good at anything at all.

He gained some fame, and leadership as he put his members in the Halls of Warriors using his own money. He also gained enough Soul Points to learn at least 3 basic skills, though, he was disappointed by how little H.P. and M.P. he had gained.

Haroon distributed his bonus points equally to the 6 basic stats. That was enough to cover the points lost by the death penalty.

He was pleased to see his new status window.

Name: Haroon

Race: Human

Class: Swordsman

Level: 22

Title: Mercenary guild leader(and 5 others)

H.P.: 1,315 **M.P.:** 1,365

E.F.P.: 450

Strength: 50(+15) **Stamina:** 41

Intellect: 25 **Wisdom:** 43

Luck: 35 **Agility:** 38(+12)

Endurance: 16 **E.S.P.:** 12

Focus: 22 **S.P.:** 93

Fame: 1290 **Leadership:** 465

Fire Resistance: +10%

Magic Resistance: +10%』

‘Oh, right! I got an item after killing the Hobgoblin.’

Haroon quickly opened his inventory and checked his item. It was a small bead.

‘What is this? Is it a strange one again?’

He felt betrayed by his expectation as it was another bead-looking item, right after he got a strange marble as a reward of the last quest. Still not losing hope, he checked the information of the item.

Poison Bead

Type: Magical ingredient, Medical ingredient

A bead that was formed by the coagulation of the Hobgoblin’s poison. Strong and pure poison like this item has a lot of usages, often required for several poison-magic experiments, or for creating antidotes. It absorbs weak kinds of poison for the carrier. Sprays poison if the user can infuse mana.

He was disappointed once again. He expected that it wouldn't be a good item, but he didn't expect it to be a common item. He also thought about controlling Brat's poison with the bead, but realized that Brat's poison would not be weak enough to do so.

This item might be a great item to poison users, but it wasn't worth much to Haroon. Though he uses poison as Brat does, his ability was not related to poison.

'Well, I guess there will be a use one day.'

Haroon put the poison bead in the inventory, then joined the conversation with the others.

Chapter 12

The dungeon of Lump Orcs

“Damn it! What kind of GM¹ is this?”

Megrum sighed without knowing. He was a natural-born genius, who had graduated high school and university at a very young age. And now he brought honor to his family by being employed at Necomwall, the world-wide famous conglomerate, on his first application when others needed to do at least three interviews. Thanks to him, the whole family was able to move to District B from District D.

“I’m so lucky that I decided to get you as my son.”

His foster father was a career soldier who spent his whole life in the Union Defense. He was now bragging about his son all over the world. Though Megrum found it a bit embarrassing, as an artificial human, he was feeling proud of being able to pay back his parents’ grace of adopting him.

The house that the Union assigned to them was a mansion with a garden. His foster mother really loved it because of the earthy smell. Her hobby was cultivating flowers, and since she had now gotten an entire garden, her smile never went away from her mouth.

The first job assigned to Megrum was as sub-administrator of the game called *Beyond*. Because administrators – also known as GMs – usually had ultimate control of the game, he felt proud that the company was recognizing his genius.

Though *Beyond* was a game that Necomwall developed, it was quite different from other games. One of the top secrets was that the company itself didn’t have control over the game system.

Beyond was a virtual world realized with two Ancient Computers and thousands of Supercoms, and now these two Mothercoms, which have their own will, were fully preventing humans from intervening with the world of *Beyond*. It made no sense to Megrum that the game developers did not have any control of the game, so he had to

ask higher officers what the matter was, but no one could give him an answer.

“Well, I heard that was the deal they made with the Mother computers.”

“Yeah. It was a contract between the Whole Global Committee and Necomwall to be exact. And I heard we couldn’t do anything about it as the WGC had ownership of the Mothercoms and Supercoms.”

The words of his GM Colleagues were shocking. Megrum did play virtual games before, but he never heard of any games being run like this.

“Then what makes a GM different from the users?” said Megrum.

“Well! We are still the highest rankers unofficially,” Said Chornn.

Like how Chornn said, that consoled them for not having control as GMs. They started with characters with the first job advancement done for them. It was also fun to play the game with ordinary users. Though, they had their tasks to do.

“But Chornn, why do we need to find unofficial rankers?”

Chornn smiled. Chornn was an elite who graduated from the Ko-1 Top University as a top student, who joined Necomwall at the same time as Megrum. Though, his social class was too low to make it into the nobility of the Union.

“People say the Union Military is going to make a large-scale special employment.”

Megrum tilted his head. His father was in the military. Even though his rank was not that high, he knew lots about operations because of the years he spent in it, but Megrum had never heard of such a thing from his father.

“This might be news to you, but it was found that people gain abilities by training in-game, if they use prime capsules like we do.”

“That makes sense. Prime capsules with specially designed suits connects your whole nerve system to Beyond. They might be simple electronic signals, but your body learns from it. Swordsmen or Warriors should be able to use the same techniques once they train their physical body.”

The capsules Necomwall provided were prime ones. Moreover, because it came with specially designed suits, the sync rate was near 50%, which was known as the limit the current technology has achieved.

Though the movements in-game was not a replica of the physical body, the body was getting stimulated via the suit and the capsule, which allows them to use some abilities in real life.

“This game is somewhat different. The other GMs say, WGC, the unions and Necomwall cooperated on developing Beyond for some reasons, and one of them is to train soldiers to face Orgs and Harks.”

“Well, can’t they simply train special units by selecting elites from the Union Defense?”

And that was the standard procedure, since one had to be physically agile and strong to be a career soldier.

“Some say most of the rankers are agents of Union defense. They’re already doing it.”

“Then why are we looking for unofficial rankers?”

“Well, the thing is that there are talented people among gamers who were originally found incompetent. There were some reports saying that incompetent users were found gifted while playing virtual games.”

“Hmm... So you are saying this game was developed with a military purpose in mind.”

That was the hidden intention behind the development of Beyond, the game that was most popular in the eastern Unions of the Eurasia continent.

Megrum learned a few new things after he got into Necomwall, before the task was given to him. The first thing is that the outside of the barrier is quite different from what the Union education system teaches, and it is more effective to use traditional weapons than firearms when fighting the mutated species or beasts.

But Chornn’s expression told Megrum that Chornn was still in question.

“But I don’t think that’s all. It feels like something larger is behind this. Otherwise, the nobles wouldn’t have allowed this surreal game to be published to the public.”

“You do?”

Chornn too, was a genius by birth, which made the nobles feel jealous and do horrible things to him. So he has an ambition of becoming a noble when he grows up.

“And I’m pretty sure the true intention will be revealed as the Golden Battle proceeds.”

With Mothercom’s special consideration, GMs were sent to a special stage where they were able to get their first job advancement in a week, and reach level 80 in three months. But surely it wasn’t this advantage that attracted these newly hired GMs’ attention. The word ‘True Intention’ excited Megrum.

“Well then, let’s go and meet Imperial Princess Briella.”

“Yup. Correct me if I’m wrong. So we are looking for talented people or unofficial rankers who gathers around the imperial family, right? And we were assigned to Briella.”

“You’ve got it. Though, isn’t it great to be paid for playing a game?”

“Hahaha! I can’t agree more!

Shaking off the uncomfortable feeling of not knowing the true meaning of the development of Beyond, they had to travel to the Viscounty of Paros, where Briella would be. Though now they were destined to live the life of playing the game for months, occasionally emptying the excretion bag and disconnecting for regular exercises, their faces were still bright.



Devron and Paros gave their wholehearted support to Haroon for accepting the quest of escorting Hall to the Huk’ran Mountains. Thanks to that, the Gusts of Wind were able to bring enough supplies for the journey, including expensive potions and elixirs.

It took two days of walking for the Gusts of Wind and their V.I.P. Hall to reach the river Seine, the south natural border of the Huk’ran Mountains. Having its source at the highest peak of Huk’ran Mountains, Seine had a large volume of water with vast width. Though it was quite deep, it was flowing right through the rocky terrains, where there

were some places with narrow gaps.

Ordinary people would not dare to cross the river, but Haroon and his members found and chopped down a tall tree that grew roots in the rocks, to form a bridge. Though it broke a sword that Gitan was bringing to look cooler, Gitan didn't mind at all as he was now using a shield as his main weapon.

After crossing the river unscathed, they headed north, following the river, not daring to climb the mountain right away. As they heard people say that dangerous monsters like ogres have their habitat at the center of the mountains, they figured out the riverside would be safer.

But there were still countless monsters that had the riverside as their habitat. As the riverside was rich with herbivores, numerous groups of orcs and goblins were having those as their main food source.

With Teeno's helpful skill, they were able to avoid encountering any huge hordes, but it was inevitable for them to encounter small numbers of monsters, several times a day. Mainly because the riverside were either a plane field, or shrub forest which didn't provide enough cover to hide their bodies.

But there were no reason to avoid having battle with a small number of monsters. In fact, Haroon intentionally chased down the groups when their number was less than 10, so it was actually fortunate for them. The Gusts of Wind needed more experience.

"You useless piles of orc dipshits, smelly ugly orcs!"

" ... "

"You wanna die? Where are you staring at? I'll make a necklace out of your eyes!"

" ... "

Ritrina's taunts were at the peak, and was always followed by the members' silence of shock. Her taunty look and curses were so effective, that the orcs that heard her taunts chased her no matter what, even though they didn't fully understand what she said.

But the monsters that chased her had to face the giant shield of Gitan. It was big enough for two men to hide behind, and was forged from a single sheet of steel, so it

dealt a lot of damage upon impact.

“Shield Attack!”

Gitan's *Shield Attack* was a simple, yet impactful skill, which was pushing the shield forward. As he got stronger by always carrying a heavy shield, Gitan was able to parry back even two or three weapons at the same time.

“Shield Crossing!”

Three orcs' bodies were cut into half as Gitan swung the shield. As his skill level is still low, he wasn't able to use the blades at the side effectively, but it was still good enough.

“Smashing Blow!”

When Gitan wasn't able to make his next move because of the momentum, Philip dashed out from the back of Gitan and stabbed the forehead or neck of the orcs that still were in a daze because of the impact with the shield. It was easy for him to attack still targets. And now, he had no problem with handling more than one enemy.

“Multi blow!”

Multi blow, the evolved version of Smashing Blow was an intermediate skill that uses slightly more mana, and allows the user to stab multiple targets simultaneously. To use this skill effectively, Philip was in need of finding a sword with a more narrow and sharper blade. If the number of enemies were more than Philip could handle at a time, Haroon attacked with his throwing knives. Because the skill had to be used in a focused stance, there was a little bit of delay between the skills.

Haroon's knives never missed even when he had to attack multiple targets. Clearing the Dungeon that Rumm brought him to, gave him enough S.P. for his newly acquired skill, *Multi-shot*, so he learnt it as they left the castle. As he was able to use it a lot in the Huk'ran Mountain, Haroon's *Multi-shot* was already at level 2.

With his current E.S.P. stats, Haroon was now able to observe the movements of his muscles if he focused enough, which allowed him to practice more precise movements, and with his reckless way of training, he learned to throw six knives at the same time at different targets, three in each hand. He still needed to practice distributing enough power to each of the knives, but he was getting there. Meanwhile,

he leveled up 3 times.

“Yes! This is a big one!”

Serinn was now having fun with skinning the monsters. She got so used to it that she had become able to skin a whole body by herself, without having the others help her with pulling off the leather. Seeing her skinning a dead orc with a smile, nobody would be able to match her to old Serinn back in the Merc. Academy.

“I don’t see any other monsters in this area.”

Ritrina reported, after scouting around. Then the members eased the tension and sat down on the ground.

“Well done, Ritrina.”

“Teeno, my *Taunt* skill has reached its maximum level!”

On Teeno’s compliment, Ritrina proudly bragged about her achievement, giggling. Haroon thought her words were probably true, considering how her taunts were making the members angry as well. Ritrina was having so much fun using her own skill instead of what she learnt in the Hall of Warriors.

“You call that a skill? *Tsk tsk.*”

Philip clicked his tongue seeing Ritrina so proud of such a skill, but Serinn’s words were over the top.

“Heh, so you finally reached your *final* level of *Basic*, yeah? I’m sorry to tell you but my butchery skill reached intermediate level a long time ago.”

It was easy to tell that it was true, seeing how skillful she was at using her dagger. She was now skinning a monster without letting any blood wet her hands, which meant she is able to skin without touching any blood vessels.

Seeing blood stains on her hard leather, Haroon realized how much she might have gone through. Haroon felt a bit sorry that he has messed up such a beauty, but he wasn’t going to feel sorry about it.

‘I don’t think you are out of the noble category yet. You still need to change,’ he thought.

He turned his eyes away from her, and looked at his other members.

“Well done, guys. Philip, how are things going for you?”

“Slaying a few more would level up my *Multi-blow* skill to 2, Boss.”

Philip shook off the blood from his blade, then put it back into his scabbard. During the first journey, he was mastering his basic skill ‘Smashing Blow’, and now he was mastering *Multi-blow* that he learned in the Hall of Warriors. Like the tip of his blade, his eyesight was getting sharper.

‘He is indeed a sincere guy. It’d be so much better if he learns a skill in case he needs to fight alone.’

Haroon was worried about Philip getting way to used to fighting in a group. Of course, his stabbing skills were agile and precise, and has been effective so far. But when the battle becomes a dog fight or when he had to face multiple opponents, Haroon knew he would struggle.

‘When we get to the training center in the middle of Huk’ran Mountains, I’ll ask Hall if they could give him a chance to pick up a sword technique or two.’

And it was the same for everybody, as a member’s improvement meant the guild’s improvement.

Philip was the main damage dealer in the Gusts of Wind. While Haroon personally thinks that Teeno is the best member, he was poor at combat. To mercenaries who’d be constantly facing dangers such as monsters, combat skills were the primary concern. That would probably be why Teeno was not accepted into other mercenary communities even though he is a Grade-C Mercenary.

Now Haroon looked at Hall, who were watching the members nonchalantly. He couldn’t tell if she was looking at the members, or the scenery behind them.

‘It’s so hard to get close to her.’

They’ve been travelling for more than 20 days, but Hall was never a part of the group.

Seeing how she does not talk to the members who are commoners, her social class must be high, but Haroon had no idea about who she really was.

Devron never mentioned her rank specifically, and even Her Majesty Briella was not treating her lightly, so maybe she's a descendant of some important family. In that case, it was fortunate that she wasn't looking down on the members, or was hostile to them.

Drawing his attention away from Hall, Haroon stacked his knives back. The leathers that she skinned were well stacked and was ready to be carried on Gitan's back. That stack of leathers were well-dried and was ready to be sold for a good price.

"Teeno, let's find a place to rest around this place."

The sun was barely going over the peak of the mountain.

"Sounds like a good plan. I'll look for a campsite."

With agile movements, Teeno disappeared into the small bush forest. His *Messenger Moving*, which Teeno told Haroon that he learned from Devron, was well-trained. *Messenger Moving* was an altered version of *Messenger Walking*, which allowed the user to move the whole body faster, although the power of accumulating mana is weakened dreadfully.

With decades of training, Teeno was now constantly casting *Messenger Moving* on every move he made, subconsciously. Although he didn't know, he was now accumulating some mana.

Back to the routing, they were following the river Seine, but now they had to enter the Mountains. The place they stopped at was rocky terrain, which acted as a sign for the beginning of the mountain. While Teeno was looking for a campsite, the members rested, and maintained their weapons.

Though the sun was still high up, Teeno said it'd be better to rest and set off early at dawn as they'll have to pass Cliff rift.

"Are we finally entering the Huk'ran Mountains?"

Hall opened up her mouth after a long time. As if she was a mute person, she hadn't

been speaking very much. Gitan even forgot about her existence a few times. As an assassin mage, she was good at hiding her existence, even when they are moving together.

“Yes we are. According to Teeno, Cliff rift that we can see from here is the passage to the peak of Huk’ran Mountain, so we should be arriving at the Training Hall within three days maximum.”

Haroon wondered what kind of place it would be. What kind of people would be training, and what kind of training are they taking. Everything was hidden behind a veil, so the members and he were making lots of assumptions.

The users were making their speculation on the game as well. The last time Haroon checked the official webpage of Beyond, there was lots of forums talking about their opinions and expectations of the Golden Battle. And according to their intel, Briella had the weakest force of all the participants.

That was a false assumption to Haroon. He saw Paros’ and Devron’s faces which were full of confidence. It was positive that they had a secret force that the others did not know about, and Haroon assumed it to be the force that is being trained in the secret training camp located in the middle of Huk’ran Mountains.

While Haroon was lost in thought, Teenno ran back to the members with excitement on his face. It didn’t take long for Haroon to notice him.

“Boss!”

“What’s the matter?”

When Teenno came to the group, the group was already ready for combat. It was a pavlovian reaction that their body made because of all the fighting they had been through for the last 20 days.

Even Gitan, did not seem so scared. He had his trusty shield with him.

“I-I think I found a d-dungeon.”

“I’m sorry?”

The members drew closer after hearing Teeno's words.

"Well, I found a small cave that I presumed to be a wolves' den under the big boulders on the way to the rift so, I took a look at it, and it seems like a dungeon."

"Lead the way!"

As Teeno lead the way, the party ran toward the dungeon, full of excitement. If it really was a dungeon, they hit the jackpot as all they got during the journey was the leather of goblins or orcs.

Haroon wasn't the only one who was excited. It was common sense that a dungeon is a perfect place to get experience and treasures. This was mainly due to the legendary figures of the mercenary world, as their strength was known to be acquired in the dungeons.

Teeno stopped near the bottom edge of the cliff. Withered by water and air for an unimaginably long time, boulders and rocks of different sizes were lying on the ground, they probably came off from the cliff. Teeno lead the party to the crack between the rocks, covered with tree roots and vines

"Wow, that's a great spot for a dungeon."

"Yeah. Nobody would find such place if they're not Teeno."

Like how Philip and Gitan said, the crack between the rocks were barely visible because of thick tree roots.

"I thought there would be some caves nearby the cliffs, and I felt a sudden change of temperature in the wind, then I found this place."

Teeno indeed had exceptional ability in scouting.

Because of the time difference, the season of autumn had begun in Beyond. The atmosphere was cool enough, so they could definitely sense warm wind coming from the crack.

"Let's head in."

Pulling the vines to the side, Haroon headed into the crack.

[You have found the Lump Orcs' Dungeon]

With a short UI sound, an information window popped up in front of Haroon.

Lump Orcs' Dungeon

Difficulty : B – Temporary Dungeon

Full of ores and mana stones, this volcanic area of Huk'ran Mountains is the habitat of the orcs who survived through continuous consumption of a mixture of water and manastone combined by the volcanic heat. While being separated from the other orc tribes, time caused mutation to their bodies, adapting themselves to store absorbed mana; resulting in the form lumps on their head, gradually enhancing their intelligence and physical ability.

Monster types:

Lump Orc Warriors – Lv 35~40

Lump Orc Raid Leaders – Lv 60~70

Lump Orc Witch Doctors – Lv 70~80

The Lump Orc Chief – Lv 90~100

Objective:

Defeat: The Lump Orc Chief, 5 Witch Doctors, 10 Raid Leaders, 400 Warriors

You have been rewarded for the discovery with:

100 Fame

30 S.P.

300% Drop Rate until the dungeon completion

This dungeon cannot be registered.

‘That sounds so dangerous,’ Haroon thought

According to the intel Bell collected, the number of registered dungeons started to increase recently. This meant some users has become cartographers or finders. But most of them were dungeons with difficulty D, and C in some rare cases, but there were no official records of dungeons with difficulty B.

‘Just what kind of monsters are the Lump Orcs?’

Their level was more than two times higher than ordinary orcs, which are known to be about level 15 to 20. It became a concern of his, as the difficulty was way too high for them. The party dungeon he just went through had a difficulty of C, and the entrance requirement was a party with at least 10 members. Theoretically, this dungeon would need at least 90 members to be beatable.

While Haroon was thinking to himself after checking the dungeon information, the members were giving their speculations.

“Yuck! This is the smell of orcs!”

“Then it’s a monster dungeon.”

Teeno lightly nodded while listening to Philip and Gitan’s words. Deep disappointment was drawn over their faces. Unfortunately, this dungeon wasn’t some kind of secret lab for magicians nor an ancient ruin. If it was, they could have gathered a fortune that one can’t spend in their lifetime, and a legendary skill, but fate betrayed their expectations.

“But still, it’s a dungeon, isn’t it? And the monsters are easy-peasy-lemon-squishy orcs!”

Said Gitan, who was not afraid of the orcs anymore.

“You’re right! I wonder how good items these guys have.”

Ritrina seemed excited, so was everyone. To those mercenaries whose daily salary was 50 Silver, the items that they could sell for at least 30 Gold was still a fortune.

But Haroon was still considering whether to risk fighting with the monsters. These NPCs did not have any intel, but he, a user, did know a lot of things. He simply wasn’t feeling right about this as he didn’t know what kind of orcs Lump orcs were. Not knowing what would be waiting for them, their numbers were way too low to strike right away.

“This is gonna be fun!”

On Ritrina's excited words, Haroon shook his head. These NPCs could say this kind of thing very easily because they knew nothing. So Haroon made a safer choice.

"Let's make a basecamp near here and take a rest for today. Tomorrow morning, we'll leave our loads at the basecamp and enter the dungeon with light bodies."

"Do you think it'll be fine, Boss?"

Cautious Philip asked, seeing Haroon's face.

"There is no trace of orcs at the entrance, so it's either them not coming outside, or there is another entrance that the orcs use."

"Boss is right on that. Though the smell of the orcs are present, I don't think they're near this place. I'm a bit concerned because going into this dungeon just smells dangerous....."

Teeno slurred his words at the end. He must have felt the danger by instinct.

"Let's scout ahead and then decide."

"Sounds like a plan."

Teeno's judgment on terrains and monsters was always trustworthy, so they decided to follow his decision. As Haroon said, they began setting a basecamp near the entrance. Since they never knew how long it would take to clear the dungeon, they brought some food and basic needs with them, but left everything else at the basecamp.

After spending a night at the dungeon entrance, they entered the dungeon as soon as the sun rose. Although they didn't talk about Hall accompanying them, she followed them in.

The dungeon was in the form of a cave. The naturally formed cave was very long. Like how Teeno commented about the entrance, they couldn't meet any orcs even though they walked for quite a while. They had to crawl through some small passage instead, but it wasn't impassable.

It took about a half an hour to encounter an orc for the first time, in the most awkward

way possible.

It was sitting on a hole, with its feet on each side of the hole to support itself, exposing its pink rump contrasted to its furry body, and ready for 'action'.

"Oh man! Yuck!"

Because of the smell it made which was incomparably worse than the humans', in the end, Gitan grumbled, pinching his nose.

"Shhh!"

As Teeno warned him to be quiet, Gitan shut his mouth, but it was too late. It heard the noise and turned back, and surprisingly enough, the orc had a lump on its head.

Haroon quickly threw a knife before the situation got uncontrollable, but it didn't hit the target.

"Damn it!"

Haroon couldn't believe his eyes. Not because he missed a still target, but by the orc being quick enough to pick up its ax and block the knife, even in that awkward position. Shocked by the scene, the group hesitated to make a move, and it gave the orc enough time to get into a stance, then it charged at the group.

"Shield Attack!"

Gitan stepped forward and blocked the first attack. With a loud impact sound, the ax and the shield made a spark and bounced off. While the orc was still staggering from the aftershock, Philip quickly made his move.

"Smashing blow!"

The sword of Philip, who almost mastered the skill, was able to find its way easily, piercing its target.

The orc's eyes widened. Philip spun his sword and made a hole in its neck. Then it was pulled out with a stream of blood, and the orcs eyes were losing its light.

“This... This is.....” Gitan mumbled.

Gitan was still shaking his hands. It meant the orc was hard to deal with. Besides, Philip’s face took on a set expression, despite how he had slain an enemy.

“It moved even when it had a sword in its neck. That’s not all. My sword didn’t hit where I aimed, in fact, it was far from it.”

On Philip’s words, Teeno drew closer to the corpse and inspected it. Like how he said, the hole was far from the center of the neck.

“It’s a lump orc!”

It was Hall, who was watching the situation from behind.

“Did you just say lump? Well, It really does have a lump on its head.”

With curiosity in mind, Serinn drew closer and looked up and down the corpse. It was a head taller than the a normal orc, and its muscular body made them recall the orc warrior they’ve seen a while ago. She touched the lump on its head.

“It’s hard like a horn. Could this be a bio-mana stone by any chance, Hall?”

A spark of greed was reflected on Serinn’s eyes for a brief moment.

“I find that unlikely. Bio-mana stones are formed when a beast or a monster happens to consume a mana stone, or a portion of it. In most cases, the consumer dies because their body cannot handle the flow of mana. But in very rare cases where the consumer have a strong physical ability and is born with the ability to handle the mana flow, they survive and the body adapts to use mana, mainly using the manastone. As they live, the manastone gets larger and larger. We call that a bio-mana stone.”

“Then what is this?”

“There are not many things known about it, but what’s known is that those humps are coagulation of unused mana that the monster consumed. When the Bio-mana stones have higher purity and better conductivity than the ordinary mana stones, these humps are just multiple layers of raw mana and monster tissues. Because it requires a complicated method and presence of high-ranking magicians to use it as a

manastone, it's not really useful."

The magician Hall was able to answer Serinn's curiosity.

'Well, that's a shame.'

Haroon secretly hoped for it to be a mana stone, as Haroon couldn't summon Brat because of the poison.

'Well? Who knows!'

Haroon took out his katrat knife and cut out the lump. Though it has poison on it, it didn't matter as the one who'll be consuming it would be Brat.

"Prepare yourself, since these monsters are much stronger than the ordinary orcs."

On his word, the group nodded and held their weapons tight.

"Boss. Do I have to skin th-this thing too?"

"Why do you ask?"

Serinn simply pointed at the corpse's rump, which were still full of 'residues'.

"Well, the leather seems good. I think we can sell it for a higher price than the normal orcs' leather."

"As far as I know, lump orc leathers are sold for five times or even ten times more than the ordinary ones. Its toughness and durability is valued quite highly."

As Teeno adds, Serinn frowned.

"But there are still residues on it..."

"What's the problem when you can wipe them out?"

Knowing that no words would work, Serinn lowered her head and sat down near the corpse.

“Hey, Ritrina, why don’t you help her with wiping it off?”

“Wait, Boss, WHAT? ME?”

Haroon left the raging Ritrina behind and went to the hole that the orc was sitting on.

There were more than 40 holes, with most of them enclosed with stone lids. It seemed the place was a toilet of some sort, extended from the other entrance to where the group came from. Haroon lifted the lid of many, only to close it right away because of the foul smell. He wondered what kind of things the orcs ate.

“Make it quick! It seems like the monsters are using this place as a toilet, so let’s ambush them from here.”

When Ritrina was about to protest on the order she just got, Haroon coldly spoke and that made her give up. She knew Haroon needed to see his orders done when he spoke like that.

Like how Haroon said, there were about 5 to 6 holes that didn’t have lids on, which were just wide enough for the orcs to sit on comfortably. It was obvious that this place is a toilet.

“The orcs know the concept of toilets?”

“Remarkable. Even humans only build proper toilets once the town gets big.”

Teeno and Philip spoke with wonder, pinching their nose.

“Stay here. I’ll be right back.”

Thinking about the lump he cut out from the orc’s head, Haroon backtracked a little bit. Before he turned around the corner, he glanced over the shoulder. He could see Serinn getting ready to skin the corpse, and the others were gathering around her.

Haroon summoned Brat when he thought it was far enough.

“Brat.”

“Sup? You’ve not been summoning me these days.”

[You are poisoned! You are receiving 10 damage per second.]

As expected, Haroon got poisoned so he quickly took an antidote.

“I’m running out of antidotes, so I couldn’t summon you as often as before.”

“Meh, not news to me. I knew you would. Haven’t you heard the phrase “prepare more than you need”? How are you gonna live your life if you can’t prepare yourself like this?”

There it goes again. Haroon got an urge to open its head and see if it really thinks he is its master.

“Shut up or you’ll get punched. Your choice.”

“Hmph, are you always gonna use violence when things don’t turn out in your favor? I don’t think you should abuse the Covenant of Time Immemorial that pets cannot hurt their summoners. You know, I’m so much older tha-”

Haroon took out the lump and shoved it into its mouth.

“Take a bite of this.”

“Wha-What was that about?”

“Just taste it.”

“Huh, this is? This is a mana chunk! It’s mixed with some messy stuff, but it definitely has a high mana density!”

Haroon smiled inside.

“Do you think more of these would regain your ability and allow you to evolve yourself?”

“What do you mean ‘I think’? Of course they would. They are so much better than uncommon items!”

With small eyes, it greedily looked at the horn and drooled over it.

“How many do you need?”

“Hmm, if they have the same amount of mana, 50 should do it, I think? Because it is a mixture of mana and flesh, it’ll be rather effective on me since I need to absorb various types of mana.

“Damn, that’s a lot.”

Brat regained a lot of its ability by absorbing poison-type mana in the swamp after killing the Orc Warrior. But it got worse as it cast a vast scale of elemental magic that were beyond its ability when it helped Haroon and his party cross the river.

‘Well, if that saves at least an item... ’ Haroon thought.

“Ok, I’ll get you those, but under a condition.”

“Huh? What condition? It’s a Master’s duty to evolve their pet!”

“I knew you’d say that. Just don’t, if you don’t like it. I’d better keep you unsummoned forever since I’m running out of antidotes anyways. That sounds probable, considering your bratty words and behaviour, who can’t even consider its master as its master.”

On Haroons words, Brat crumbled its ugly face.

“He-hey, Mas! That’s a breach of contract!”

“Have I contracted with you to evolve you?”

“Well, you haven’t, but... still...”

Smiling inside, Haroon told him what the condition was.

“You said you can make a subspace once you evolve, right?”

“Yeah, that’s right. That’ll be my bedroom.”

“How big is it?”

“We-well... about 10 times of this place?”

Haroon looked around the place he was in. If Brat’s description was right, three horse carts would fit in the subspace.

“I’ll get those horns if you let me use the subspace.”

“Wha-what? Mas, that’s a bit...”

“I’m your master anyways. That means all of your things are mine, and I’m saying I’ll use some of yours. Is there a problem with that?”

“Of course that’s...”

That was not true. Although Brat was Haroon’s pet, using its subspace required its permission. The subspaces are treated as a kind of permanent item that’s maintained by the pet’s mana, so they are treated as a part of a pet.

“Well, I’ll take that as a yes.”

“Ma-mas!”

Brat seemed perplexed by Haroon pressing his argument, but its mind was already conflicting with the need of those horns.

“Look, I am willing to fight strong monsters with my life in order to regain your ability and evolve you whom poisons its master when they get summoned. Can’t you appreciate your master more?”

Brat frowned on his words, but it admitted the fact. Though it was resting as Haroon couldn’t summon it, it knew he was trying to get mana stones for it.

“But my body gets bigger when I evolve, Mas.”

‘Oh, really?’ he thought.

He came to realize that no one knew anything about elemental pets. Users, NPCs, no

one had elemental pets.

“Well, let’s make it half then.”

“Ok, ok, Mas.”

That was still bigger than a cart. A same-sized magic bag would cost more than 500 gold. Moreover, no robbery would take place in the subspace, so it was a perfect place to store important items. Though he still had a lot of empty space in his Inventory, he simply wanted to have a subspace.

As he got permission to use Brat’s subspace, Haroon unsummoned it and returned to where the group was waiting for him, with a deep smile on his face. Everyone in the party who saw Haroon’s smile had different opinions on it, but they were all shaking with fear because of the odd situation – Haroon’s eyes coincidentally being on the red chunk on the flesh of the lump orc.

‘Whoa, that’s bloody. He really is a cruel one.’

Not to mention Teeno and the Quad Wankers, even Hall was frightened by his smile. Even though Haroon became the main source of fear in the party, Haroon didn’t even get a hint about it.

“How’s the leather?”

“.....Oh, yeah, the leather! It’s great. Its toughness is incomparable to the normal ones. It was so hard to skin as I couldn’t skin it with ordinary daggers. I had to use several times more strength to skin it, you know? Though I haven’t seen the leather of ogres, wouldn’t it be similar to this?”

Serinn answered Haroon’s question, and admired the skin.

“That’s great. Let’s massacre more of these.”

After all, the monsters were the enemies of humans. Though they had no idea of how many lump orcs exist, and one of them even surpasses the ability of several normal orcs combined, the quality of their leather was too great to have them give up the dungeon. Moreover, he could gather more horns and money. This was a chance that they couldn’t miss.

Serinn's body shook with fear. The smile on his face created the most basic horror that a human can ever get. Like yawning, the horror spread to the group in a matter of seconds. The Silence filled the space and strangled their necks.

"Well, let's hide somewhere and assassinate them as they come."

Haroon decided to reduce their number before they proceed.

If they had an intelligence of understanding the concept of a toilet, they needed to be extra careful. But the best reason was that the toilet is where the creatures lower their guard to the minimum.

It wasn't hard to kill the Lump Orcs in their toilet. There was no need for the other members to join the fight. They simply had to hide behind a huge boulder.

The throwing knives that were shot at the orcs revealing their lump couldn't miss their target. Even when some of them heard the sound of a knife cutting the air, their fates were already decided when they lowered their guard. The throwing knife messed up their intestine after entering their anus. They died with excretion.

'I've never seen such a cruel scene like this.'

Teeno shook his head. As the number of dead orcs increases, the fear on the party increased accordingly. As they witnessed the scene of a knife entering the weakest part of the body, they felt the same pain of something penetrating their bodies.

'I-I'd rather die during combat.'

A Coward, Gitan's face was paled white. He felt like he would die any second, because he thought he would forget how to breathe.

Fortunately or not, the time that strangled the party ended quickly. It was because of a group of orcs who came to find the orcs that were not returning after they went to the toilet. It was an expected scenario as Haroon had slain more than 20 lump orcs.

"Boss, there are five of them."

Teeno figured the number of lump orcs just by hearing the footsteps.

“Each person will be marking one each. Attack as soon as I throw my throwing knives. Hall, assist us with your magic. Teeno, scout ahead when the fight breaks out, so we can retreat early enough when the backup comes.”

“Copy that.”

The party waited without making a sound. Although they got rid of the corpses by dumping them in the hall, they couldn't get rid of the smell of blood. This came to the party as a concern, as there was a chance that it would cause the ambush to fail.

As they waited for a chance in the shadow of huge boulders, they could see a young lump orc and 4 older ones. The young one entered deeply without thinking, but the other ones approached with cautiousness as if they smelled blood.

The group of orcs found it odd that there were no trace of anything when they definitely could smell the blood. Puzzled, they tilted their head and approached a hole that was pumping out foul smell. When they were about to check the hole, Haroon threw 5 knives with both hands.

“Multi-shot!”

Multi-shot was a skill he's been practicing in the field. With this skill, he was able to throw knives at multiple targets at the same time using each fingers' strength. Though the skill level was low, it was effective against multiple large monsters.

But the knives couldn't kill the lump orcs, except the young one. The lump orc warriors' ability was higher than they thought. It was still fortunate he hit an orc's shoulder, and another's thigh.

Among the Quad Wankers who threw their bodies at the orcs, Ritrina was the first one to enter the combat. Her target was the one with a throwing knife hit on its thigh. It was an easy target for her as she was out of the orc's sight who had lowered its upper body unwittingly. She swung her blade at its head.

The orc reacted quickly and attempted to dodge as her shadow drew closer. In the blink of an eye, the blade hit the shoulder and it screamed. It was a skill that she learned in the Hall of Warriors. Passing the orc, Ritrina turned around and quickly stabbed its body multiple times.

But her blade only cut the afterimage of the orc who stood up using its rebound after lying on the ground. Unlike how big it seemed, the lump orcs were able to make swift movements.

The injury triggered its unique chest voice to explode out of its lung. Intimidated, the orc shouted. On the next moment, it dropped its arm and its weapon. It was because of Haroon's knife penetrating its head, through the mouth when it was shouting.

"Shield Attack!"

Shouting, Gitan firmly grabbed the shield with both hands and shot his body at an orc. The orc had no intention to avoid the shield being charged at it. The orc swung its mace that had the size of a boulder, shouting back.

"Kugh!"

With a large sound, they both bounced off at each other's strength. Seeing how Gitan spat blood and the orc just staggering, they could tell the orc had won the battle of strength.

"Smashing Blow!"

Philip kicked the ground and shot his body at the staggering orc. His sharp blade was heading toward the orc's eyes.

The orc's scream burst out once again. But it didn't mean Philip's attack was successful. With unexpectedly swift movements, it avoided the blade hitting its head, but it couldn't dodge the blade and got stabbed in the shoulder. Even before Philip could turn his wrist and make the wound wider, the orc quickly held the blade with its hand.

"Eek!"

With all his strength, Philip tried to pull the blade out, but the blade wasn't moving at all. Instead, the thin blade started to bend as if it was going to break. Haroon quickly threw a knife to help, but there was no more time for that. It was because he heard Serinn screaming, who had the lowest combat skill.

“Kyaa!”

Serinn’s body was flying in the air, after squarely blocking the greatsword swung by the orc. The sword which left her hands were broken in half. As if that impact didn’t bother the orc at all, it was raising its arms to finish her.

“Serinn, you idiot!”

Haroon shot his body toward the broken sword that was flying at him. With a high jump, Haroon stepped on the handle of the broken sword and kicked it in the air to jump even higher. His hands were already ready with a steel sword.

“Hey!” Haroon shouted at the orc.

The orc turned its red eyes away from Serinn and toward Haroon. Haroon’s steel sword was slashing downward with tremendous speed.

The orc was perplexed by Haroon’s sudden appearance, but it swiftly moved its greatsword and blocked Haroon’s sword with its side. But that wasn’t the end of Haroon’s attack. Haroon’s sense sword skill helped Haroon to find an opening while blocking or dodging the attacks.

Haroon landed on the ground so close to the orc that he could smell its bad breath. Without any hesitation, Haroon swung his sword at the orc that had a greatsword longer than Haroon’s height.

Though Haroon’s sword was quick, the orc used the side of the greatsword to block his attacks, as if it had a lot of combat experience with humans. It tried to attack, but as Haroon took away the lead from it, it needed to focus on defence.

Haroon’s sense sword was level 5, which now allowed him to cast it even if he didn’t focus on the combat. He looked around for a second to see the situation.

Gitan was staggering and slowly moving back with the shield in his hands as two orcs swung blows on the shield. The combat consisted of Ritrina and Philip hiding behind the shield and jumping out whenever they had a chance, and hiding back.

But Gitan’s staggering was getting worse and worse. Because of the shock from the impacts, a thin stream of blood was flowing out of his mouth, nose and ears.

“Hall!”

Haroon called Hall, who had made four fireballs in front of her and was waiting for the chance. It was frustrating for him to see her waiting for one when she needed to make one.

“Woah!”

It was his mistake of not focusing on his combat. The greatsword was falling on him. There was not enough window to avoid the attack.

‘I’m giving the shoulder!’

Clenching his teeth, he dashed forward and to the side.

“*Aagh!*” Haroon screamed.

Fortunately, he was able to avoid the blade, but the handle hit his left shoulder. It felt like his bones were broken. He felt like he was losing vision from the pain that felt like something hot was burning his skin.

By giving up his left shoulder, he got close to the orc. Clenching his teeth once again and kicking the ground, he held his sword tight.

Surprised, the orc tried to pull back, but Haroon’s sword was chasing it from the ground. This was a sign that Haroon successfully traded his shoulder with its chest. The orc’s eyelids were shaking from fear. It pulled its upper body back with flexible movement, but Haroon’s sword was not missing it.

The sword cut through the flesh.

Haroon successfully stabbed the heart of the orc. The orc screamed, dropped its greatsword, and held Haroon’s sword. Haroon turned his wrist with all his strength. As the wound widened, blood spurted out like a fountain. The Lump orc’s hand seemed to stop the sword, but slowly, it was turning.

Soon, the orc’s body started to collapse. Its hands were about to be cut in half, but its strength was still there.

With a low shout, Haroon pulled the sword, and shook the hands away. Knowing that the orc would die in any second, Haroon turned away from it and checked the situation.

The orcs were afraid of the fire. Hall's fireball hit one of the orcs and burned its fur, and when it was trying to put out the fire, Ritrina's blade cut it several times.

The burning orc screamed and was enraged. Killing it wouldn't be so hard. But the problem was the orc with two lumps. Unlike the other orcs, the orc with two lumps was hitting Gitan's shield, and was blocking Philip's attack without any problem.

'This isn't going well.'

Though Ritrina was helping them, she was busy enough with blocking its attacks. Moreover, even if he helps, Haroon couldn't use his left arm. Though there is Hall, if the orcs flood in while they were in combat, that was the end for everyone. His left arm was going numb. This meant the wound was worse than the pain he was feeling.

[You have leveled up by 2!]

As the level gap was so high, Haroon leveled up by 2. Experience gained was so much higher than he expected.

Though, it was fortunate that he was able to level up in such a situation. He was about to take a potion because he was losing his hit points due to the injury. The impact of levelling up at the end of combat was huge, as he was able to feel the pain from his numbed left arm.

Haroon took out a knife and summoned Brat.

"We are in a hurry!"

"Got it, Mas."

Getting poisoned while injured was so much more dangerous than being just poisoned. But he had to risk it.

"Integrate!"

In the speed of lightning, Brat flew with the dagger at the orc who was parrying Philip's sword with its ax. Though the knife was fast, the orc wasn't so dull that it could get hurt by what it could see. The knife hit the wide ax and bounced off, making a short high-pitch sound.

But the orc didn't know that it wasn't the end.

A short scream of pain leaked out of its mouth. There was the whole blade of the catrat knife stuck in the back of its neck. How could it have expected the bounced off weapon to return like that?

"Whoa, your throwing knife skill, I can't get used to it," Said Philip, wiping his sweat from his face.

"Still, it-it's cool, aint it."

Gitan was standing relying only on fear, horror, and unknown willpower. After saying those words, he collapsed to the ground with his shield. His body was still shaking because of the impacts he received during the battle.

Haroon unsummoned brat and took an antidote.

[You have slain an Raid Leader. You have gained 5 S.P.]

[You have leveled up by 2!]

As soon as the orc that inflicted serious amounts of damage on the members died, Haroon could hear the UI sound that alerted him of his level up. On the same moment, Philip ran at Ritrina and held her shoulder to stop her from slashing the dead body of the orc.

'She really is a berserker,' Philip thought.

Philip wasn't the only one who thought so. Haroon had the same idea. Not only her tauntings, but the way she fights in combat clearly showed that she was born as a berserker. But being crazy and being lead by instinct in combat wasn't necessarily a bad thing.

When she goes berserk, she was fully using her ability. On the top of that, the

amplification of her instinct allowed her to find a way to limit the enemy's movement and open up the chance for her, like Haroon's *Sense Sword* skill. On the negative side though, she became so exhausted that she couldn't move her finger by an inch when she returned to normal.

When Haroon was thinking about that, someone held his hurt shoulder.

"You're hurt."

It was Hall. Though Haroon never found her likeable, he felt no need to remove her hand. Instead of saying something back, Haroon grimaced his face in pain.

Hall took out a healing potion and poured about half of it on Haroon's shoulder, which was so messed up that they could see white bone with their bare eyes. Then she handed the rest to Haroon.

"Thanks."

Without saying a word back to Haroon who shortly thanked and drank the potion, she took some bandages out of her bag.

Soon, unbearable pain greeted Haroon. He kicked it out by moaning. The effects of the healing potion is accelerating the cell and tissue regeneration process, but the pain it brings was comparable to breaking teeth. It was a relief that the pain didn't last long.

"You held it well."

As he felt her hand grabbing his shoulder, he opened his eyes without knowing. He could see her hands illuminating with light of mana.

"*Cure!*"

The light of mana gave an indescribably fresh feeling to the wound that the pain was about to be relieved. The combination of a potion and healing magic helped such a horrific wound to get back to normal.

"You'll have to use it less for a while," she added.

She carefully wrapped his shoulder and neck with the bandage. Haroon's body winced

everytime her careful hands touched it. He felt like he could smell her sweet breath as they were so close together.

‘Hall was a woman too?’

It came as a fresh blow to him as he had never thought of any woman as a woman. A faint, but comfortable scent, warm and soft hands, and her warm eyes. He could feel all of them vividly.

“Th-thanks, Hall.”

Was it because of his eyes that were somewhat warmer unlike usual? With blushes on her face, she avoided his eyes.

“Be careful when using your arm.”

Sadly to Haroon, she got up after softly whispering those words and headed to Serinn who was moaning and unable to get up on her own.

Footnotes:

¹GM – Gamemaster, Game manager, Game moderator, etc.

Chapter 13

What have I slain?

“Boss, these monsters are too tough,” said Philip, exhausted.

His eyes rested on the orc that Haroon just killed. Recalling how tough the fight was, that the orc didn’t even seem to get tired no matter how many times he attacked, his body shook with fear.

“Let’s take a rest and heal ourselves with potions before the other orcs rush in. We’ll be in big trouble if that happens.”

On Haroon’s words, Philip retrieved the bag that he hid behind the rocks in the corner, took out some potions and handed them to Gitan and Ritrina. Those two were exhausted as well. Ritrina’s hands who were receiving the potion, were shaking hard from her lack of strength, as she had been fighting in her berserker mode.

Haroon went to the corpses and cut off their lumps, then he headed to the other entrance. Teeno happened to return at the same time.

“How’s the situation?”

“Nothing is going on, fortunately. I think the sound didn’t get out of this place as the passage is bent three times.”

Teeno’s words relieved Haroon’s worries.

“That’s fortunate, since everyone’s exhausted. Okay, and anything special about this dungeon?”

“If what I saw and assumed is right, the dungeon has a circular shape overall, and was built by digging out the dirt. Generally, the dungeon consists of four sections that are separated by the square near the central area. Each section has a maze-like passageway and rooms located to them, all in a whirl-like pattern. Unlike the other orc tribes, it seems there are more female orcs than male ones, seeing how they formed a

family-like social system. Multiple families are living in every room that is divided by dirt walls, and every passage has narrow paths that are connected to the central square.”

Haroon imagined the path of the dungeon as a top-view maze. It looked like a maelstrom.

“These orcs are remarkable.”

They were truly intelligent. They had never heard of orcs that were capable of architecture. The party was surprised to hear from Teeno’s words that the orcs built the whole cave instead of using a naturally formed one.

“I’ve never seen such a tribe in my whole life. They have built their residences like humans, and seeing how they have blackened holes with ashes that looks like furnaces, they know how to utilize fire. They are very intelligent.”

Teeno seemed frightened by what he had observed.

Of course, there are some races of orcs who became influenced by humans, and are living a cultured life. But most of them were field orcs, and their appearance were more of a human nature rather than orc-like.

It was common sense that an orcs’ intelligence was equivalent to, or less than a 10 year-old human, despite the fact that they’re stronger and more wild than them. That was why the orcs were not settling at one place, because they were not capable of farming, but were hunting or raiding villages.

But these orcs were different. Utilizing fire already meant that they have a high intelligence. Thinking of how Philip was having trouble dealing with an orc considering how his level was similar to it, it was frightening to think that there were countless numbers of them in that cave.

“Let me rest for now. Then I’ll think of what we should do next.”

“As you wish, Boss.”

Haroon looked around. Then his face darkened.

Philip, Gitan, and Ritrina were sitting against the wall and resting with devastated expressions on their faces. Serinn finally got up after Hall's treatment, and was now sitting beside Hall who just entered meditation.

"Here, gather around for a second."

Sitting beside Serinn, Haroon called the other three. They slowly stood up, and shambled over. Even though those three had already recovered from their wounds with the help of potions, they were suffering from low morale, knowing how weak they were compared to the orcs.

"I suppose defeating the lump orcs by ourselves is a bit too much to ask."

Those words made their faces bright once again. They must have been afraid of Haroon insisting on clearing the dungeon, as they were frightened by the lump orcs' strength and combat ability.

"Let's retreat for now, and come back when we're capable of clearing this dungeon."

"Wise choice, Boss."

"Let's get out of here!"

Everyone welcomed his choice, even Hall. The difficulty of this dungeon was way higher than they thought. Moreover, they had no intentions of staying in a monster dungeon, since it didn't have any valuable treasure anyways.

"Teeno, lead the others and head out of this dungeon. I'll scout this place a bit more for later."

On his words, his members started packing up and headed toward the outside, but Teeno objected.

"It's too dangerous, Boss. I know what you are capable of, but this place is..."

"I know, Teeno. I'm only scouting a bit to plan ahead for next time."

Following his order, Teeno headed outside with the others. Haroon smiled back at Teeno who kept looking back, worried, and headed inside.

‘This is the best place to regain Brat’s ability and help it to evolve. I can’t give up this chance. I can always use its poison if I need to.’

He only had 5 antidotes left, so he couldn’t summon it unless it was necessary. He simply felt that it would be a waste to miss such a chance to evolve him. With messenger walking, that his body has now internalized, Haroon went deeper and deeper.

One of the features of Messenger Walking is that the steps don’t make any sound. Absorbing the mana and diffusing it makes the body lighter, and the process also absorbs the sound, so it was a great skill to utilize while scouting.

Like Teeno said, the pathway from the toilet to the residential area was bent three times. That’s probably why the noise made from the fight couldn’t make it to the outside. The wall was studded with glowing stones at head-height, so the cave wasn’t dark at all.

‘They are intelligent enough to make these kind of things?’ He thought.

As he reached the end of the pathway, a large place came into sight. Like how Teeno said, there was some kind of square in the middle, and the large place was divided into four sections. There were buildings made out of dirt that were used as residential areas and some other purposes. Haroon could hear the sound of bashing metal objects, and he could see some large buildings that are presumably used as warehouses. These orcs do live like humans.

Haroon could hear some orcs having a conversation, and it was not far from him.

‘Woah!’

Surprised, Haroon hurriedly climbed the wall near him. Although the wall was quite high, it wasn’t refined smoothly so there was a lot of things to grab on. To avoid getting caught, Haroon climbed over the glowing stones.

‘Huh? What’s this?’

The wall further up from the glowing stones was still in darkness, and the wall near the ceiling was still not polished, so there was a lot of solid places to rest on. They

probably didn't bother to smooth out the ceiling.

Looking from above, Haroon could see two lump orc warriors hurriedly heading toward where he was.

'They must be going to the toilet.'

Seeing how they were not armed, waddling toward the toilet with their hands grabbing the belly, Haroon doubted if these guys really were the lump orcs that he just fought with. But without hesitation, he took out some throwing knives, making sure not to make any sound. He had to be extra careful as the lump orcs' senses were sharp.

As soon as the orcs passed the point right below him, the knives left Haroon's hand silently. He was using multi-shot.

'Some might call me a coward, but I have no other choice.'

The knives hit the back of the orcs' heads. With a short scream, they staggered and soon collapsed on the ground. Haroon hurriedly headed down and dragged the bodies to the toilet.

"Damn! That was damn heavy."

Their bodies were a lot heavier than he thought. After cutting off their lumps, Haroon dumped the bodies into the hole. He had to give up on their leathers.

"What do I do now? Do I retreat and come back later? Or do I want to make a play right now?"

He didn't have his members to help him, but he detested the idea of giving up this chance. He wanted to regain brat's ability and evolve him now if he could.

"Well, let's finish this for now. I'm running out of antidotes anyway."

Making up his mind, he headed back to the entrance where his members would be waiting for him.

The members and Hall were resting against the wall near the entrance. Unlike the inside of the dungeon, the darkness has drawn over the outside.

“Let’s rest for now.”

The members were so exhausted they weren’t interested in what Haroon had found inside the dungeon, and they slowly started moving, doing what they needed to do to prepare a good meal and a good place to sleep. They made dinner with the deer meat they hunted the day before, and finished their meal with a cup of tea. Haroon let his members and Hall rest, and went back into the dungeon. The Quad Wankers fell asleep right away after the dinner, but Hall and Teenoo stayed awake to see him off.

‘They must be coming to the toilet as this is after their dinner time.’

Haroon was intending to sneakily attack the ones that would come to the toilet. Although he wouldn’t be skinning the leathers, getting the lumps was enough for him.

And his assumption was right.

The orcs were flooding into the toilet. Haroon waited for the perfect moment where the orcs would be lowering their guard to their lowest, but he soon changed his mind.

Because the orcs kept coming in continuously, Haroon once got found by the orcs. If it wasn’t for his skill to integrate brat into one of his throwing knives, the whole plan would have failed.

Haroon went back to the place where he hid when he went scouting. It allowed him to make safer choices when attacking the orcs. As the orcs were going to the toilet from their residences, their guard was already low, so there was no chance they would sense Haroon’s throwing knives.

Once he killed an orc, he quickly dragged it to the toilet, cut off the lump and pushed it into the hole. To avoid getting caught, Haroon opened up some holes that had an excessively foul smell, and used Brat’s elemental magic to spread the smell.

As Haroon’s actions were very careful, and as it was the time that most of the monsters would be sleeping, no orcs had noticed that something terribly wrong was going on around them, until Haroon had almost gotten enough lumps.

‘Just one more.’

Dragging the heavy dead bodies of orcs and summoning Brat so many times made him feel very tired. Although he regained health and mana with help from potions, he couldn't do anything about the mental exhaustion. When he was planning to get just one more lump, a giant orc's silhouette came into sight.

'It's the Orc Chief!'

Its size was twice as big as the other lump orcs, which was as big as a young ogre. It was wearing luxurious armor, self-made or stolen from humans, and it had 3 lumps on its head.

'The hell? Does this one sleep while wearing gear on?'

Haroon was perplexed. It was even wearing a helmet made out of gold, spiked gauntlets and boots.

'There's no way I can kill it with my throwing knives.'

It was only exposing its face and the front of its neck, which was not a place he could hit from above. Even a raid leader could deflect his throwing knife, so there was no way his knife could make it to its face if it was thrown from a place where it can see him.

While Haroon was thinking of which move to make, the Orc tribe chief passed where he was at. Then it suddenly stopped and made some kind of moan. It lowered its body and inspected the ground. The orc tribe chief had found the trace of blood and the trace of something being dragged over the floor.

'Shit! Now all I have is Brat's poison!'

Haroon summoned Brat on stand-by mode and told it of his intention.

– 'Brat, I need some kind of sleeping poison'

– 'Leave it to me, Mas!'

As if it knew its owner was doing hard work for it by even deciding to give up his time for sleep, it followed his order without the bratty behaviour it used to make.

The Orc Tribe Chief seemed to be sure that something had went very wrong, and took out its waraxe. Oddly enough, the axe was not shining at all, but its sharpness was frightening.

It was fortunate that it hadn't called the other orcs yet. It was not known if it was not sure of what was happening, or if it was being overconfident in its abilities. If it had called the other orcs, it would only be a matter of time until Haroon and the passage in the toilet was found.

While the orc chief carefully went around the corner, Haroon summoned Brat by voice, trying to be as quiet as he could.

"Summon."

Brat quickly followed the tribe chief. As soon as the UI sound alerted of the poison status effect, Haroon quickly took an antidote. He could hear the orc chief shouting.

[You have been feared by the Orc Tribe Chief. You are stunned for 3 minutes. Your ability is decreased by 20% for 5 minutes.]

Stunned for 3 minutes from just hearing its shout? This boss monster was way more frightening than he thought. But it seems that the skill was not only affecting him. He nervously looked over the dungeon, but there was no sign of anything moving.

After 3 minutes, Haroon jumped down from the ceiling and headed toward the passage. Although it was a large place, it was an enclosed area so the Orc Chief's shouting was echoing around the cave.

He needed to run away as soon as he could.

After turning around the corner, he could see Brat spraying something over the Orc Chief. Presumably some kind of sleep-inducing materials.

The Orc Chief was covered in the fog, but it wasn't falling asleep that easily. Instead, it was swinging its axe around, and surprisingly enough, its axe was covered in a mana-blade.

"It is a prime-expert?!"

It was capable of using mana on the blade. Though its level is high, Haroon didn't even imagine it to be able to use mana. He dropped his jaw.

It was shocking to know that not only was it physically strong, it was able to use mana like the knights. This was valid proof that the lump orcs are intelligent and have high abilities.

"It's too dangerous! Come back!"

The Orc Chief was not even able to open its eyes because of the fog, and it was swinging its axe around chaotically, which put Brat in danger. Although no normal weapon could damage an elemental spirit, a mana blade was dangerous enough to harm it. Making a creepy smile, Brat flew back to Haroon.

"Hehehe! I thought you didn't like me as all you do is beat me up..."

It made a rather nasty smile. Brat was in a good mood as it realized that its owner actually cares about it.

"How did it go?"

"Well, it's still resisting my poison as its level is high, but it'll fall asleep in no time. Hehehe! The material will spread inside its body even faster since it moves so much."

Just like what Brat had confidently said, the Orc Chief fell asleep soon after. Hesitating for a second, Haroon bit his lips and took out his steel sword. As the orcs would have heard the Orc Chief's shouting, the orcs would be rushing toward him any time now. Though he didn't like how he was killing it when it couldn't even resist, he put all his strength on the sword and cut its neck.

The Orc Chief died in vain while sleeping, not even being allowed to scream.

[You have slain the Orc Tribe Chief.]

[You have leveled up by 8!]

[You are rewarded with 300 gold!]

[You have gained 200 Fame.]

[You have gained 50 S.P.]

[You have been granted the rare title of 'Lump Orc Slayer'.

As a reward, All of your stats have gained 2 points.]

[You have acquired an item.]

[You have acquired an item.]

Even before the UI sounds finished, Haroon took out his catrat knife. Though he would get poisoned from using it, there was no need to worry as he already took an antidote.

Haroon removed the helmet from its head, and removed the lumps. No other weapons were sharper than his catrat knife, and it cut off the lumps with ease. After putting the lumps in his inventory, he quickly moved to run away, but soon, he changed his mind.

‘Welp, I can’t leave these items behind.’

He started looting the dead body. He removed the golden helmet, the spiked gauntlets, and the armor that covered its entire body. Though the dead body was almost too heavy to even flip over, the thought that these items would bring him some money made him feel lighter.

‘Huh? What is this?’

While cutting the chains that connected the armor parts with his catrat knife, he found a leather pouch near its chest. He wanted to check its contents, but there was no time for it. Haroon just shoved the items into his inventory.

Fortunately, he had enough time to finish all of that before the orcs came. He could hear the orcs’ footsteps echoing behind him. It seemed like the orc chief’s shout had stunned its hench-orcs as well.

Haroon quickly returned to the toilet and went through the passage he came from. Before he left the toilet, he covered the passage with boulders. Just in case the orcs chased him.

Before he reached the exit, he stopped and caught his breath, then he summoned Brat.

“‘Sup, Mas?”

Its voice was as high as it could be, and was full of loyalty, which he had never heard before, but he had to finish this quickly.

“Well, do whatever you can with these! Is there anything else you need?”

“This should be enough. Mas, I really appreciate it. I’ll do my best when evolving.”

Its voice was shaking with happiness.

“Just do something about that poison. How am I supposed to summon you like this?”

“Well, I’m really sorry about that but I can’t do much about it. They are not just poisons but a combination of all polluted materials so even if I evolve, I don’t think I can do anything about it...”

It really seemed sorry about it. Haroon gave up on expecting something.

“Nah, never mind. I’ll just have to get some poison-resistance item or some kind of skill related to poison.”

“But when I evolve, I’ll be able to use intermediate elemental skills as well, so I promise I’ll help you a lot.”

“Yeah, you better! How long will it take, though?”

“About a week.”

“At least I hope your appearance will be more likeable. Well, it doesn’t need to be likeable but just not uncomfortable.”

“You got it, Mas. Look forward to it!”

Smiling, it went back to his inventory. Seeing it positioning in the center of the lumps, Haroon took out the items he’d newly acquired.

“Right! My status!”

He was looking forward to it as he had leveled up several times.

“Holy shit! 15 level-ups?!”

Massacring the lump orcs made him level up 15 times after leaving the Viscounty of Paros. Haroon distributed the bonus stats equally to his 6 basic stats. And proudly, he

looked at his status window.

Name: Haroon

Race: Human

Class: Swordsman

Level: 37

Title: Mercenary Guild Leader (and 6 others)

H.P.: 1,510

M.P.: 1,540

E.F.P.: 500

Strength: 57(+15) **Stamina:** 48

Intellect: 32 **Wisdom:** 50

Luck: 42 **Agility:** 45(+12)

Endurance: 18 **E.S.P.:** 14

Focus: 24 **S.P.:** 183

Fame: 1,780 **Leadership:** 465

Fire Resistance: +10%

Magic Resistance: +10%

Haroon checked his items as well. First, he checked the items that he acquired by killing the orc chief. One was a skill book, and the other one was some sort of weapon. It seemed that he got swordsman-related items since he was one.

Crazy Sword (Intermediate Skill Book)

It is a skill book about an intermediate, sword-related martial art named Crazy Sword. The caster falls into a berserk mode that increases their normal ability by 2~10 for a limited time. Extreme pain follows as soon as the skill ends.

Requires 100 S.P. to learn.

Duration increases by 3 minutes per skill level.

Ability multiplication is proportion to the skill level (1:2).

Requirement: Level 40 swordsman, and mastering one basic swordsmanship technique.

“Well, this is for Ritrina, I suppose.”

Ritrina was a born berserker, so this skill would be perfect for her.

Haroon's eyes shone brightly as soon as he checked the other one.

"WHAT?"

It was a set of thin, almost-transparent throwing knives. There were 4 in total.

Ghost Blade set

Class: Unique

The crafting material is not known. But seeing how it becomes invisible when thrown using mana, it may have been made out of the beak or claws of an ancient monster called Ghost Wyverns. These special knives become invisible when the owner puts mana in them, and are sharp and durable enough to cut steel. Retrievable.

Requirement: mana user.

"This is it!"

He finally got an item that he could use. Although he couldn't use them for now, they were exceptionally good items which he can utilize once he learns to use mana. Who would be able to easily detect blades that were invisible like a ghost? Moreover, it was durable enough to cut or penetrate steel, exactly what Haroon was looking for.

The happiness that the Ghost Blade Set brought him simply blew away his mental tiredness. While celebrating, he checked the items that the orc warchief had.

The Lump Orc Chief's Helmet.

Class: Rare

The helmet that represents the head of an orc tribe. It is made with a combination of gold and mithril, and a unique spell from the lump orcs. Inflicts fear to weak monsters.

On equip:

Wisdom +5%

Opponent's ability is decreased by 10%

Durability: 95/100

Armor points: 141/150

Equipment Requirement: 40 Wisdom

The Lump Orc Chief's Armor

Class: Rare

Made with gold, mithril, scales from white wyverns, and a unique spell from the lump orcs. Inflicts fear to the opponent.

On Equip:

Party member's loyalty is increased by 100 points

Charisma + 10

Durability: 165/200

Armor Points: 245/300

Equip Requirement: 50 Strength

The Lump Orc Chief's Boots

Class: Rare

Made with wyvern's leather, feathers, bones and a unique spell from the lump orcs. Mana users can stay in the air for a limited time.

On Equip:

Agility +5

Stays in the air for 3 minutes on cast.

Durability: 115/120

The Lump Orc's giant War axe

Class: Rare

The giant war axe that represents the head of an orc tribe. Made mainly with mithril,

and contains a strong unique spell from the lump orcs'.

On Equip:

Increases ally's fighting will by 10% and decreases enemy's will by 10%

Weight: 110 lbs

Attack Damage: 300

Durability: 280/300

Equipment Requirement: 50 Strength

Power Gauntlets

Class: Rare

Made with steel, mithril, and black bear claws with Dwarven technology. The spikes are made out of wyvern's claws that are known to be able to break steel. Induces fear to the enemy.

On Equip:

Strength +10

Fire, Magic, and Poison Resistance + 10%

Durability: 100/140

Attack Damage: 150

Haroon couldn't say anything. Though there was no one to talk to. He just stood there dumbfounded for a while, and one string of thought went through his head.

'It has 5 rare items equipped, and it drops a unique item and an intermediate skill book? What have I slain? This is, like a noble orc!'

Haroon smiled strangely.

'Once we escort Hall to her destination, I'll be staying at this place for a while. If this place has these kinds of monsters, it'll be enough for me and my members to level up until level 60. Moreover, these monsters are full of items! Now that's what I call hitting two birds with one stone.'

Haroon's eyes sparkled looking back into the cave, where the 300% item drop rate

was waiting for him.



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